

Miniseries mania strikes
global kidsnets **p33**

Girls superheroes line up to
kick some butt at retail **p49**

Genre watch—Canada becomes
hotspot for tween-TV production **p64**



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PRINTED IN CANADA USPS AFPM 100 Approved Polywrap
US\$7.95 in the U.S. C\$8.95 in Canada US\$9.95 outside of Canada & the U.S.

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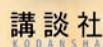
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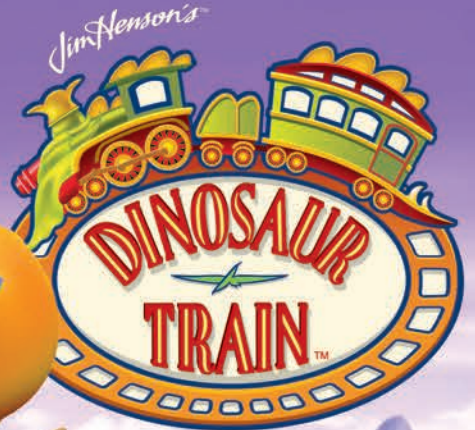


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Cover Our cover features an ad for Mediatoon's brand-new CGI series *Bobby & Bill*, while our inside editorial cover sports an image from Zag/Method/SamG/Toei Animation co-pro *Miraculous—Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir*.

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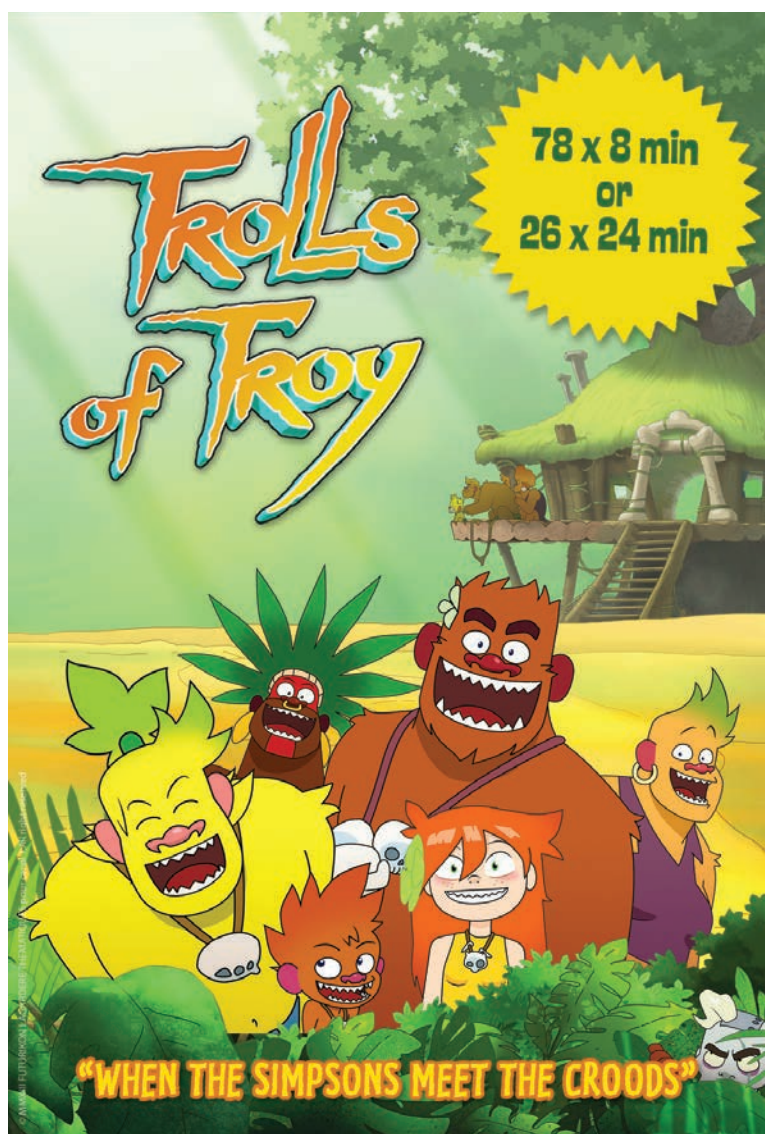


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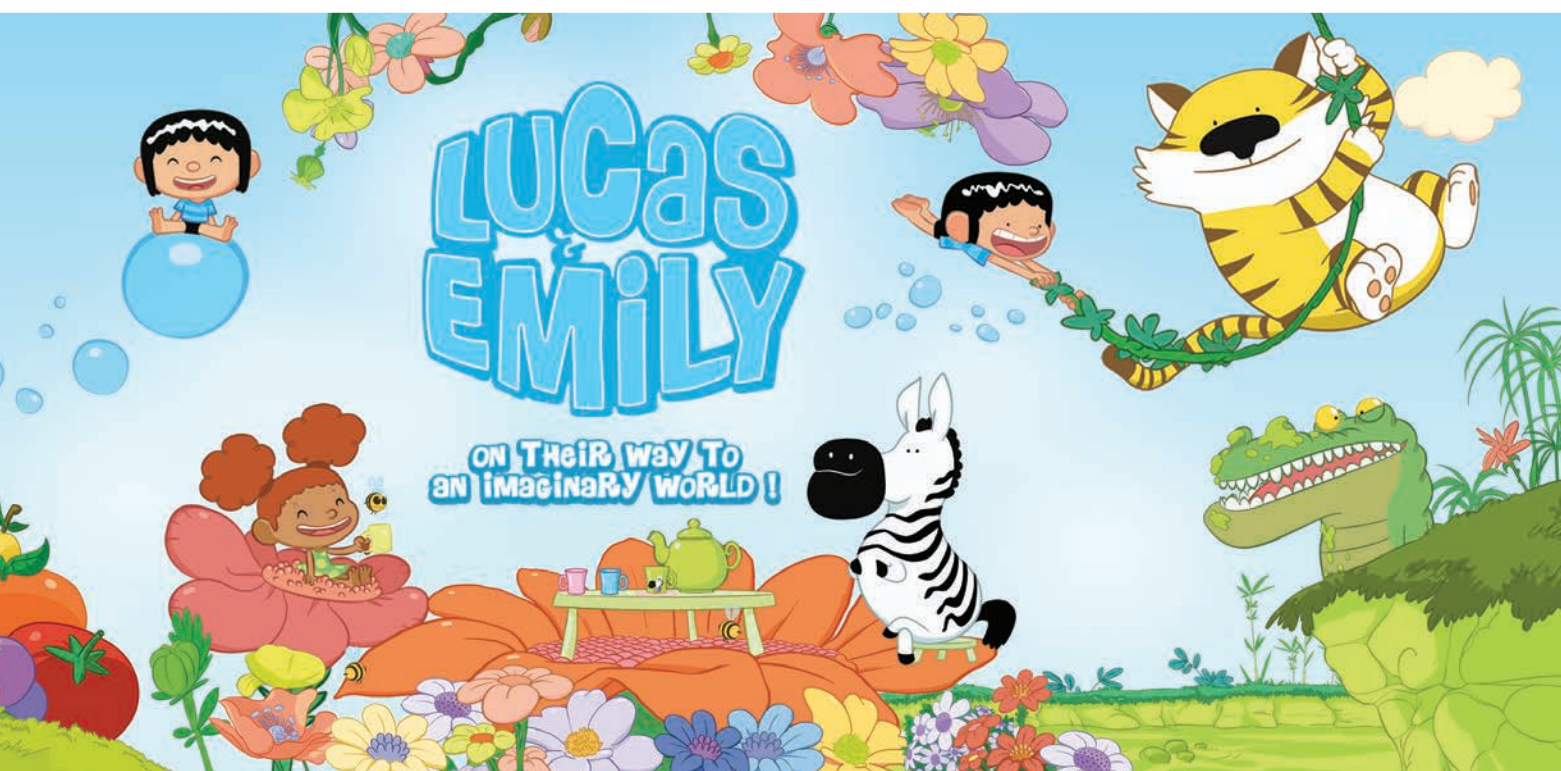


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Know your worth

In terms of budgets and buzz in the overall TV landscape, kids has never been high on the genre totem pole. The pecking order goes something like this: Flashy scripted cable dramas à la *Game of Thrones*, network dramas (Hello, *Shondaland*), reality formats like *Survivor*, and somewhere after that—kids TV. But if you believe the hype being generated in the aftermath of the historic HBO-Sesame Workshop deal, things could be about to change.



When the hand-wringing by consumer media in the wake of the mid-August deal over the state of US public television had subsided, outlets started digging into why HBO, in particular, had made the move. For Sesame Workshop, it was obvious—in one fell swoop the nonprofit ensured financial stability for *Sesame Street* over the next five years and continued to fulfill its mission to make the show accessible to as many kids as possible (albeit on a nine-month delay). For HBO, the picture was less clear. The premier cable

subscription service hadn't been producing or buying kids shows since at least 2007/2008. Why get back into it now?

The answer is spelled S-V-O-D. HBO has made a significant move into the SVOD market with the launch of its OTT service HBO NOW, putting it in competition with Netflix and Amazon. Moreover, it's been noted that SVOD services tend to suffer from a greater rate of subscriber churn—the contracts are easier to break than traditional cable, and once you've watched the latest antics of *Crazy Eyes* in all her glory, maybe you can drop the service until the next season of *Orange Is The New Black* debuts. But kids don't work that way. We know they are becoming heavy SVOD users, with even the Workshop admitting that two-thirds of *Sesame Street*'s viewers access the show on various VOD platforms. In short, as pointed out by *Kidscreen* blogger and Dubit SVP, David Kleeman, children's programming is increasingly the glue that keeps families sticking with SVOD services. Good luck to the parent who takes away on-demand access to their kids' favorite shows.

Now, HBO's president of programming, Michael Lombardo, told me that the service did not have Netflix Kids-sized ambitions when it comes to building up its children's offering. However, it is likely that HBO will be adding to the programming secured in the Sesame deal, so distributors can add another port of call to their lists. As for competitors like Netflix (and to a lesser extent Amazon and Hulu in the US), which recognized the power of kids TV content early on, it has only continued to amass an extensive kids library and ramp up its kids originals slate. This is good news for kids producers, I think. The value of their product in the SVOD market is rising and perhaps might even achieve a premium status. But gains can only be made if you know your worth. Your content is important to these SVOD services. It retains current subscribers and inspires brand loyalty in successive generations—don't let them forget it.

Cheers,
Lana

kidscreen

September 2015 • Volume 19, Issue 5

www.kidscreen.com

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To make a change to an existing subscription,
please contact us by e-mail: support@kidscreen.com
Fax: 416.408.0249 Tel: 416.408.2448

Subscription rates

Kidscreen is published 7 times per year
by Brunico Communications Ltd.
In the US: One year US\$89.00 Two years US\$159.00
Single copy price in the US is US\$7.95. Please allow four
weeks for new subscriptions and address changes.

Postmaster Notification

U.S. Postmaster, send undeliverables and address changes to:
Kidscreen PO BOX 1103
Niagara Falls NY 14304

Canadian Postmaster, send undeliverables and address changes to:
Kidscreen PO Box 369, Beeton ON L0G 1A0

Printed in Canada, Canada Post Agreement No. 40050265.
ISSN number 1205-7746

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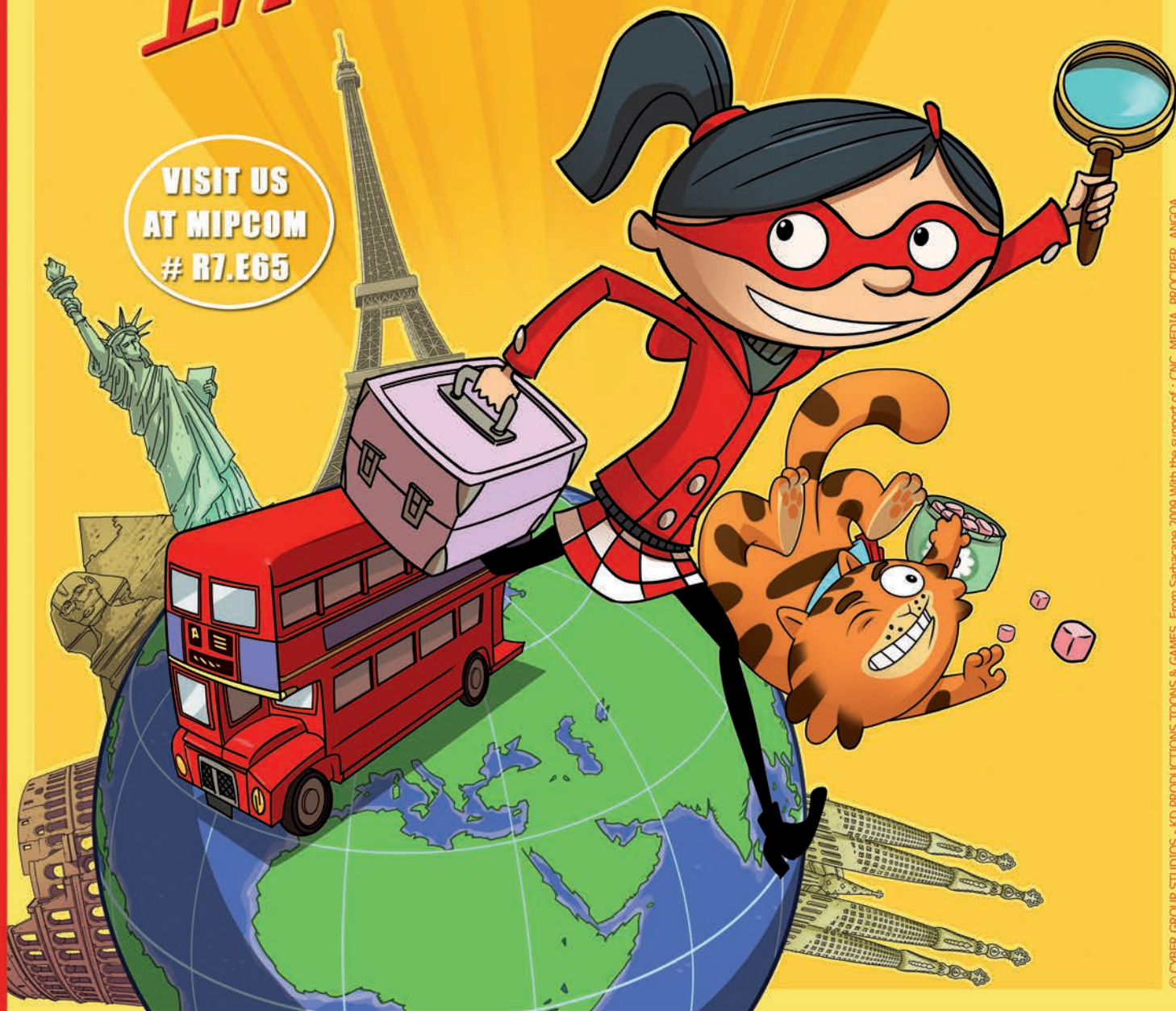
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The List

Five things on our radar this month

1 Paradox in the toy aisle

It's turning into a conundrum that no user manual can solve: Where does gender belong when it comes to playtime? According to major retailers like Target, it no longer has a place in the toy aisle. The US mass-market retail giant recently committed to removing gender-based signs—and references in the form of color-coded shelves—from its stores, citing a shift in shopping preferences. The changes fall in line with similar measures taken by several global retailers like Toys 'R' Us in the UK. But the move is not exactly putting an end to gendered toys. In fact, check out "Leading Ladies" (p. 49), which features a new crop of girls superhero properties, and witness the throng of girl-skewing tech toys that have emerged over the summer. For example, Vtech has introduced Flipsies, a line of interactive collectible dolls that shares similarities—and imaginary career aspirations—with K'nex's new line of Mighty Makers girls construction toys. In short, gendered play doesn't seem to be going anywhere, regardless of what the signs say.



2 Kids keep SVOD subs

Now that the initial fervor around HBO's landmark deal with Sesame Workshop has subsided, the true importance of kids content to SVOD services is coming to light. It's been suggested that parents are less likely than adults without kids to drop their subscriptions between new seasons of flagship shows to keep their SVOD-loving children happy. But will *Sesame Street* be enough to prevent the premium cable network from losing parent subscribers between binges of *Game of Thrones*?



3 Media market panic

It was somewhat ironic that Netflix's stocks fell on August 20, right along with big slides for Viacom, Disney, DreamWorks Animation and Time Warner, considering how much the SVOD's massive global growth has contributed to rising fears over the health of the linear TV business. Media stocks have rallied slightly since, but according to Bernstein Research's Todd Juenger, the traditional TV business is in need of a complete re-evaluation, and investors are getting skittish.




4 Courting Gen Z

Media companies are zeroing in on tech-savvy tweens like never before. Among the latest entries are Disney's new tween multiplatform girls brand Star Darlings (pictured) and Netflix, which recently acquired a number of tween-friendly exclusive films and TV series. Considering a new PwC study found that tweens are the most receptive group to messaging across all media, expect to see more tween properties crop up.



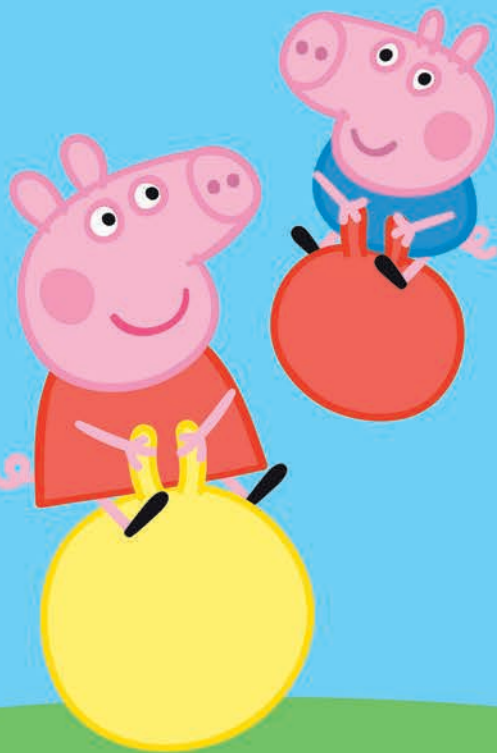
5 Consolidation continues

Creative juices—and bountiful tax credits—are set to flow across the Atlantic, thanks to the acquisition of Irish service studio Brown Bag Films by Canada's 9 Story Media Group. The move bolsters the latter's creative 2D animation and distribution capabilities with the former's CGI expertise, and it will help Brown Bag produce its own IPs. The move is also a sign of the times in a consolidating industry. And, well, DHX can't buy everything.

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Family Channel has a first-run window
on *Degrassi: Next Class*, which will bow in
January 2016 before rolling out on Netflix

A super-CHRGD transition

DHX TV fills its rebranded Family channels with a raft of new original and acquired content

Following the loss of its Disney licensing deal to rival Corus Entertainment in April, Toronto-based DHX Television hatched a plan to extend its Family brand to its other three Canadian kids channels and then remodel their programming schedules.

At the end of last month, it became official—preschool channels Family Jr. and Télémagino (formerly Famille Junior), as well as CHRGD (formerly Family XTRM), would launch this fall. While viewers will have to adjust to some changes, Joe Tedesco, SVP and GM at DHX TV, says he expects the transition to go smoothly. Family has a long legacy as a leading brand in the Canadian kids space, he notes, and DHX has ramped up its original content and acquisition activity.

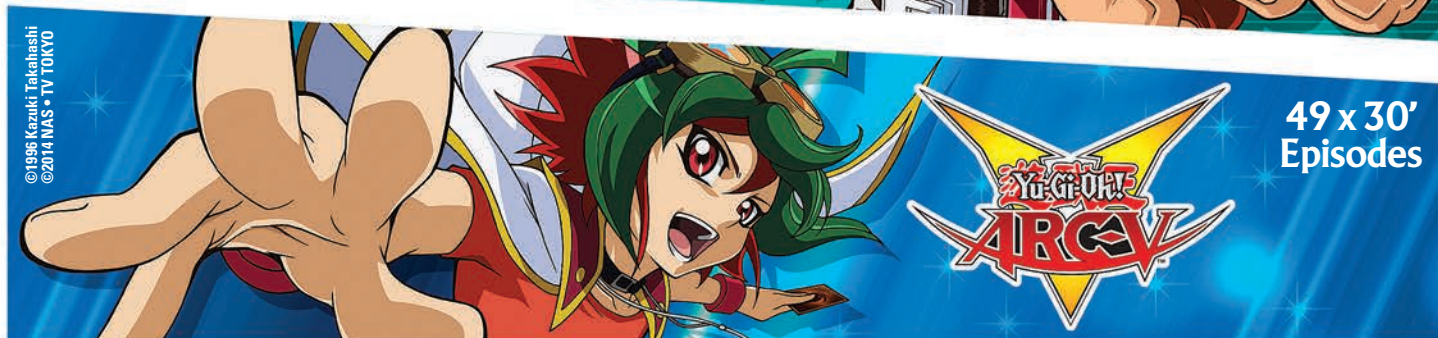
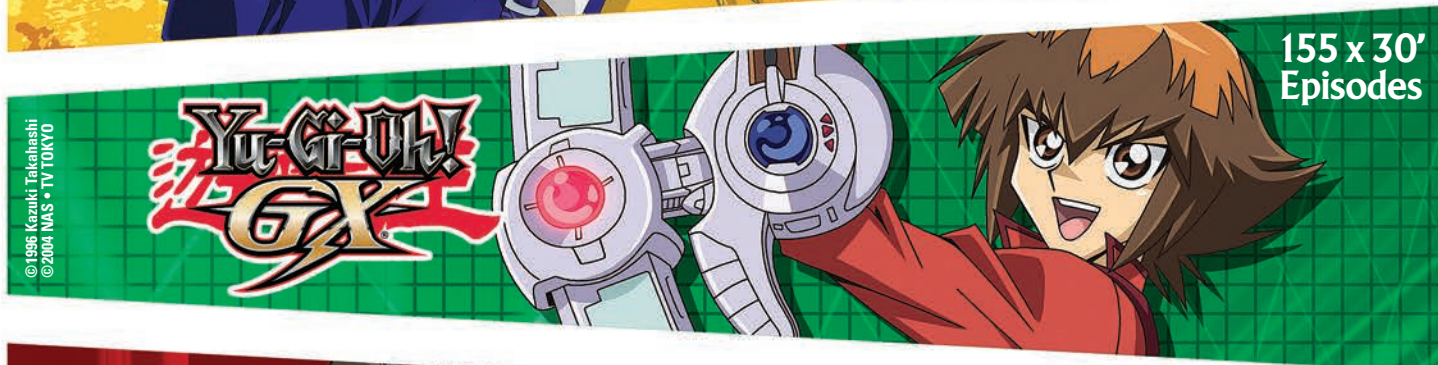
“The biggest challenge in introducing new programming and brands is the consumer re-education that you have to go through. What we’re excited about is that Family is a strong iconic brand and we’re confident we can execute the transition successfully,” contends Tedesco. “We’ve made a big investment in original content, upped our marketing spend significantly, and we’ve also been able to work with new partners as part of the evolution.”

One of its newest partners, DreamWorks-owned AwesomenessTV, has joined forces with DHX Media in a long-term deal to develop and produce tween and teen shows for Family Channel.

“We hope to create some very unique programs,” says Tedesco. “Our audience is spending a lot of time on YouTube and finding new personalities, so we will certainly pursue opportunities to have YouTube stars become part of our programming.”

Among some of the new original co-productions heading to DHX TV’s suite of channels this fall are: the CGI-enhanced *Teletubbies* reboot from UK-based Darrall Macqueen for both English-language Family Jr. and French-language Télémagino; preschool puppet series *Playdate* from Toronto’s Sinking Ship Entertainment, which will air solely on

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Family Jr.; and CGI-animated underwater adventure series *The Deep* from A Stark Productions in Australia and DHX acquisition Nerd Corps for CHRGD.

Returning Family Channel series include season three of flagship tween series *The Next Step* and a new season of *Gaming Show (In My Parents' Garage)*. Hit Disney series including *Jessie* and *Dog With a Blog* will also air until all of DHX TV's Disney content migrates over to Corus's new Disney Channel Canada by January 2016.

Additional recently commissioned Family Channel shows to watch for include DHX-owned Epitome Pictures' *Degrassi: Next Class*, Fresh TV's *Backstage*, *The Wonderful Wayneys* (Aircraft Pictures and Dolphin Entertainment) and *The Next Step* spin-off *Lost and Found Music Studios* (Temple Street Productions).

Before DHX TV's rebrand announcement, there was speculation that the company could potentially shake up the ad structure of its channels, but Family Channel, Family Jr. and Télémagino will remain ad-free while CHRGD stays ad-supported. Tedesco says the decisions are final for now, but the company hasn't completely ruled out making

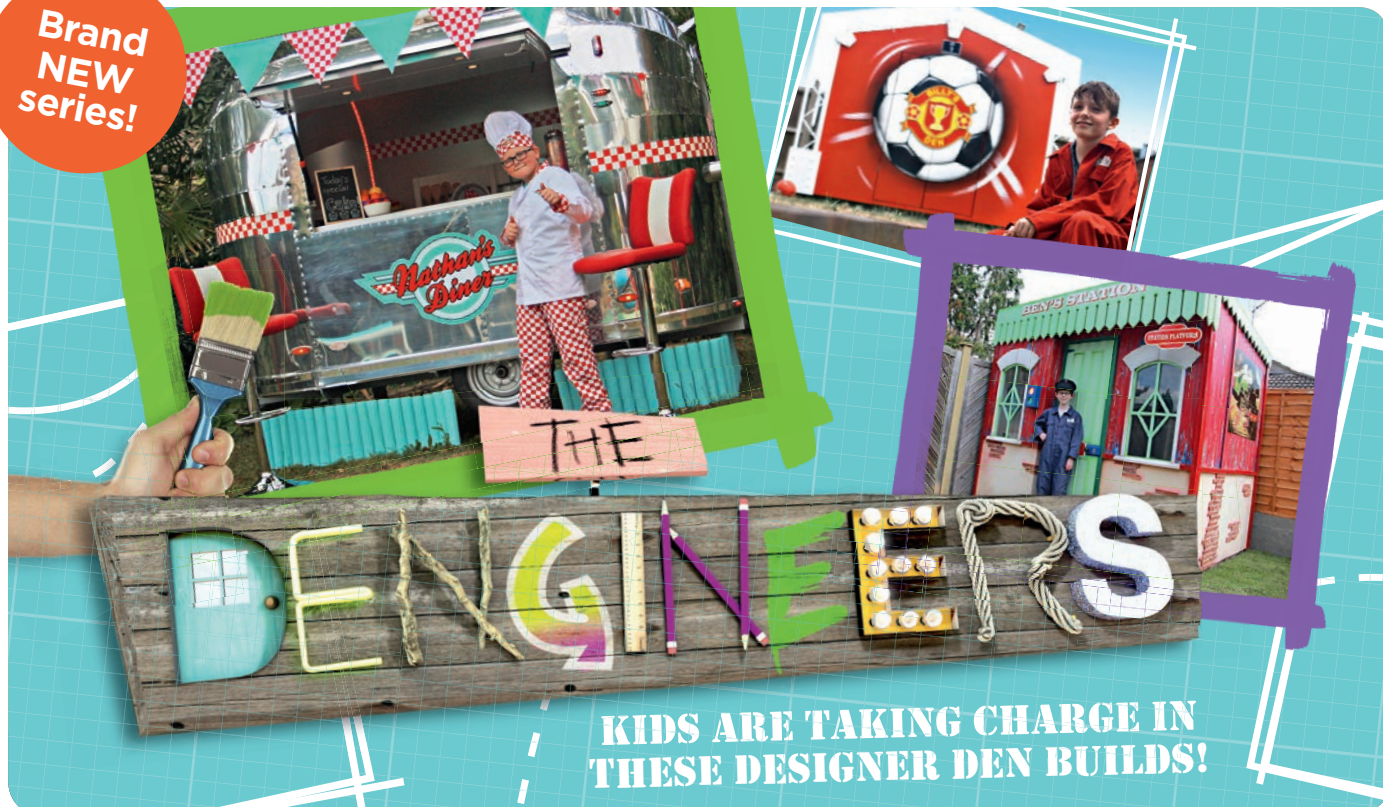


changes. "If ad-supported is a model we have to pursue given the changing environment, we are certainly prepared to explore it, but in a way that will have minimal impact on our brand and viewer experience," he says. "Commercial-free is part of our brand attributes and highly valued by parents, so any sort of future migration would have to be done in a thoughtful way."

He adds there will be more sponsorship opportunities in the near future. "We've had some good success bringing on partners in the sponsorships and promotions sphere, especially for some of the live events we create. As we ramp up our original content slate, we will create more of these opportunities."

As the considerable revamp moves forward, Tedesco says the company hasn't made any significant changes to its executive team. "Certainly director of original programming Michael Goldsmith's life has become a lot busier, given the number of shows we've moved into production," he says. "Others like [marketing VP] Paul Cormack and [communications director] Jaime Bassett, are all highly engaged in executing the transition. And Richard Rowe [DHX Media's new director of international acquisitions and co-productions] will certainly be assisting us as he's out looking for IPs to acquire for the channels." —Jeremy Dickson

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Breakthrough's feature take on iconic Canadian IP Anne of Green Gables bows in 2016

Brand belief

Canada's Breakthrough Entertainment ramps up diverse new slate of kids and family fare

Since launching 30 years ago, Toronto, Canada's Breakthrough Entertainment has become a leading hub for creative people and ideas and a world-class producer and distributor of television, film and digital content across a range of genres, with kids at the core. And just as kids programming is evolving, so is Breakthrough.

"It's an exciting and challenging time in kids, but there are tons of opportunities to produce content not only for traditional TV broadcasters, but also for all kinds of different streams and OTT platforms," says co-founder and partner Ira Levy.

One of the company's key strategies moving forward is to focus on reimagining big brands. And this summer, the company landed an original live-action movie project, in partnership with Corus Entertainment's YTV, based on one of Canada's most iconic properties—Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*.

The feature was shot in various locations throughout Canada and is expected to debut on YTV in early 2016. Montgomery's granddaughter, Kate MacDonald Butler, who oversees all projects related to her grandmother's estate, executive produced the movie which stars Ella Ballentine (*The Calling*) as Anne Shirley and acting icon Martin Sheen (*The West Wing*) as Matthew Cuthbert.

"We've always had a healthy kids slate, usually doing two or three types of shows, but we'd never done any long-form kids movies," says Levy. "Joan Lambur, our EVP of family entertainment, spearheaded the project, which we both believe will help us reach a newer, broader audience."

Lambur says the pressure of producing such a high-profile movie was not lost on the crew. "It was an unbelievably beautiful experience, but nerve-wracking because it is such an iconic brand. You want to live up to the amazing literature."

For additional development projects based on books by celebrated Canadian authors, Breakthrough is working on an animated preschool series adapted from Margaret Atwood's *Wandering Wenda* series, and it recently secured the rights to Dennis Lee's *Melvis and Elvis*. Breakthrough will produce an animated series based on the IP in partnership with Toronto-based Wexworks Media.

Among Breakthrough's current top-performing original kids shows are YTV/Nick sitcom *Max & Shred*; TVOKids' *Science Max* starring Phil McCordic (Breakthrough's showrunner on *Zerby Derby*); and animated series *Rocket Monkeys*.

As Breakthrough expands its slate (two unnamed live-action tween projects and an animated series from the *Rocket Monkeys* creative unit are in the works), Levy says the company will continue to excel at mentoring talent.

"We've been finding and nurturing talent consistently for 30 years," he says, noting that Ethan Banville, a freelance writer on *Max & Shred*, recently got his first showrunning gig on Breakthrough's new live-action/animated preschool series *Terrific Trucks*.

In January, the series was greenlit for 26 half hours by US preschool net Sprout and is expected to join its schedule in 2016.

With Breakthrough's president of distribution Nat Abraham and CFO Michael McGuigan now partners, and new additions Craig McGillivray (VP, distribution) and Martha Sepulveda (director, development and production, kids and family) on-board this year, Levy says the company is well-positioned for growth. "Our biggest opportunity is to develop more international co-productions," he says. —Jeremy Dickson

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Not just girl talk

Henson takes action to ramp up slate featuring female-centric stories



A departure for Henson, *Lily the Unicorn* is meant to appeal to toon-loving tween girls

There's been a lot of talk in the industry over the past few years about how under-represented women are in front of and behind the camera. On screen, it's arguably even worse for girls, where female role models are not exactly plentiful. According to the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media's 20-year study that examined the depiction of gender in film and TV, for every one female speaking role in a kids TV series or family film, there are three male ones. But recent moves made by broadcasters, like CBeebies' call for female-led series, and IP creators (see "Leading Ladies," p.49), show the tide is turning. And The Jim Henson Company stands to play a larger part in the discussion with its new slate that features three female-centric series.

"To me, producing entertaining shows starring girls shouldn't be a trend," says TJHC's CEO Lisa Henson. "It should be a standard line of production." To that end, with pre-school-targeted *Dot*, and older-skewing series *Enchanted Sisters* and *Lily the Unicorn*, the studio has assembled three diverse projects that are coincidentally taking the studio into 2D animation for the first time since *Muppet Babies* was produced in the 1980s.

Dot, in development with Canadian pubcaster CBC, is based on a picture book of the same name written by tech guru Randi Zuckerberg. She was inspired to pen the book during her time working in Silicon Valley, where she became well-aware that women were staying away from the tech industry. And lead character Dot is all about technology. "Dot also has a male best friend, and the show is gender-balanced," notes Henson. "But a show about technology starring a girl is making a statement." Aimed at four to sevens, the goal is to get kids in general, but girls in particular, excited about technology.

Meanwhile, being co-produced with France-based Cyber Group Studios is *Enchanted Sisters*. The project was developed internally by Henson herself, EVP of children's television Halle Stanford and children's author Elise Allen. Launched as a series of beginner novels by publisher Bloomsbury, the *Enchanted Sisters* TV series is currently being scripted and will also feature the four main characters—Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. The girls are "princesses of nature" and very much focused on keeping their world in balance and ushering in the change of the seasons.

Finally, there's *Lily the Unicorn*, created by Dallas Clayton, bestselling author of the *An Awesome Book* series. It's something of a departure for Henson in that it's targeting an older audience of kids nine to 11. Currently selected for Amazon Studios' latest round of kids pilots, the series stars gawky and ungainly unicorn Lily, who is also incredibly full of life and optimism. The comedy comes from the juxtaposition of her awkwardness and her "go get 'em" attitude. "The prevailing wisdom is that girls don't watch animation, but a lot of tween girls are tuning into shows like *Adventure Time*," says Henson. "Lily is a response to that." —Lana Castleman



Heartfelt humor

Cartoon Network's multiplatform US strategy bears fruit, big ratings

Ever since Cartoon Network overtook Nickelodeon to rank second in total-day viewing among kids six to 11 this spring, the ad-supported network has continued to gain ratings momentum. It's now turning up the heat on its digital strategies to keep its diverse original content lineup delivering.

"Changes that started awhile ago are now bearing fruit, and it's not just one show that is working; it's multiple shows like *Teen Titans Go!*, *Adventure Time*, *The Amazing World of Gumball*, *Clarence*, *Regular Show*, *Uncle Grandpa* and *Steven Universe*," says Cartoon Network CMO Michael Ouweleen.

In fact, seven of the top 10 shows among boys six to 11 on all of television, when in premieres, are CN shows. "They're all very different in texture and style, but the one thing that unifies them is a sense of humor and warmth," Ouweleen says.

The programming While CN is still the dominant network with boys six to 11, double-digit increases among girls six to 11 through 2014 and 2015, driven by shows with strong female characters like *Steven Universe*, have helped the net ascend to the number-two position for the overall kids six to 11 demo.

Ouweleen points to comedy-action series *Teen Titans Go!* as an additional driver of the network's new, broader audience. "The series is highly rated and very gender-balanced, which is a big change for Cartoon Network," he says. "We also used its success as a lead-in and as a platform to promote our brand-new original series *We Bare Bears* from creator Daniel Chong."

The network devised a modest but smart social media and digital campaign, and according to Ouweleen, it was lucky to get bits of *We Bare Bears* content in front of a few blockbuster summer movies. "We used a simple icon from the show, which was the bear stack. We put that out there weeks in advance

without really explaining what it was, and people really latched onto it," he says.

San Diego Comic-Con was also used as a platform for launching the show from a marketing perspective, something Cartoon Network had never attempted before. The event featured panels, signings, giveaways, premiere screenings and an immersive booth experience where fans could take six different selfies with the show's stars—Grizzly, Panda and Ice Bear.

In the end, the strategy worked. *We Bare Bears* premiered on July 27 as the number-one show in its timeslot with all key demos, and total premiere-week plays of episodes reached a combined audience of more than 10 million viewers ages two and up. The numbers have been so good, in fact, that Cartoon Network ordered a second season last month.

On the digital side, the network's strategy to make its content easily accessible across all platforms is beginning to pay off, too.

Digital growth Following last fall's successful *Cartoon Network Anything* app launch, which earned the micro-network a spot on Google Play's Best Apps of 2014 list, CN introduced an update to its flagship video app in July. The new *Cartoon Network App* gives kids better access to content, lets them customize their viewing experiences, and is responsive in that it serves up streaming episodes, premieres, clips and original content based on individual user preferences.

"It's a radical rethinking of what the app was before," says Ouweleen. When the redesigned app launched on July 9, it generated 416,000 new downloads, translating to more than 589% growth over the previous week.

Cartoon Network's mobile games also had a fruitful Q2 driven by three top-10 iPad titles on iTunes' overall app chart—*Attack the Light* (Steven Universe), *Blamurger* (Clarence) and *Formula Cartoon: All Stars*.

The network's total mobile portfolio generated 5.2 million downloads in Q2 and game play growth of 55% versus last year.

VOD penetration has been growing, too, on the heels of Cartoon Network besting all other kids channels for VOD transactions in November and December 2014 (Rentrak).

"The approach is still focused on giving kids an immersive experience with our content and making it easy for them to find," says Ouweleen, adding that shows don't necessarily have to premiere on the network first and can perform well across all platforms. "Our programming mirrors how the audience expects content to be delivered today."

What's next Looking at the 2015/16 slate, Ouweleen says the network is excited for its upcoming Q4 event programming led by epic feature *Regular Show: The Movie* and two miniseries—an *Adventure Time* eight-parter and *Long Live the Royals*, a four-part special from the *Regular Show* unit. "It's a funny mix of medieval and modern, and has a family dynamic we haven't tried before on the network," he says.

Additional new content will include reboots of *The Powerpuff Girls* and *Ben 10*, and more multiplatform content based on *Magiswords*, the network's first original digital series that is currently available on *Cartoon Network Anything* and the *Cartoon Network App*. —Jeremy Dickson



HotStuff



International broadcasters are moving quickly to secure preschool series *The Day Henry Met*

Hitting the ground running

Dublin, Ireland-based animation studio Wiggleywoo is primed for growth

Who For Susan Broe, falling into animation was a happy accident. After 11 years producing and directing the hit live-action music series *Planet Rock Profiles*, she had children and her life suddenly became very toon-centric. "All you do is watch animation, plus live-action work isn't conducive to having children, with the travel and the long hours," Broe says.

When her kids were very young, she met producer/ animator Gary "Gilly" Gill and the two quickly collaborated on a short original animated film for adults called *Tea with the Dead*.

"We didn't set out to form a company, but we submitted *Tea with the Dead* to Cartoon Forum. It got selected and financed by the Irish Film Board, and then all of sudden three years pass and we had multiple projects in development," she says.

Broe formed Wiggleywoo with Gill in 2012, and in three years it's promptly earned a reputation for creating award-winning original animated productions for all ages, including the newly launched 26 x five-minute preschool series *The Day Henry Met*.

The work Originally introduced at Cartoon Forum 2013, *The Day Henry Met*'s US\$1.3-million budget was raised by RTÉjr, The Irish Film Board, Section 481, Creative Europe and other broadcast pre-sales to Nick Jr. (UK, Ireland), TVO (Canada), YLE (Finland) and SVT (Sweden).

The series follows an inquisitive little boy named Henry, who encounters someone or something new in every episode like a whale, a postman, a knight or the moon. It made its television debut on RTÉjr in July and will soon air on Nick Jr. UK and its other broadcast partners, including ABC Australia, which came on board recently.

Broe says distributor Monster Entertainment is currently negotiating additional deals, including one with a US broadcaster. "I think it's resonated because the concept is quite simple and Gary has a unique artistic style," she says. "Henry is like every five-year-old, and people have fallen in love with him from the beginning."

While Wiggleywoo awaits word on financing for a second season that would start production in December, the company has two additional kids programs in the hopper. *Doopydoo* is a non-dialog preschool series starring three problem-solving friends—Doopydoo, Ladida and Dumdidum. The 13 x two-minute project debuted at MIPTV in 2014, but had been on hold while the company pushes *The Day Henry Met* forward. "We have a couple of broadcasters interested so hopefully it will make it to television sometime soon," says Broe. The second project, *Tony & Abigail*, is a 26 x seven-minute 2D-animated series for kids ages nine to 11 that will launch at Cartoon Forum this month.

Other original projects in development include an animated feature, *You, Me, The Sky and the Sea*, and an adult comedy series entitled *Scribe*.

Broe says the company intends to focus solely on original productions as it expands its body of work. "There is a certain freedom to be able to do your own work and raise your own finances. But if we can't raise finances for ourselves, it's possible we would take on co-producers," she says. "As a new company, money is always a big issue. And the animation industry in Ireland is booming, so just finding crew and staff with the experience you require is really difficult." —Jeremy Dickson

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While he never achieved his childhood dream of becoming an astronaut, **Sascha Paladino** is charting a course through the universe as showrunner of Disney's hit intergalactic adventure series *Miles from Tomorrowland*



Miles from Tomorrowland has achieved top ratings with its seamless mix of science and adventure

From the science lab to deep space

The gig Creator and executive producer of Disney Junior's *Miles from Tomorrowland*, with writing and producing credits on popular kids shows including *Henry Hugglemonster*, *Ni Hao, Kai-lan*, *Doc McStuffins*, *Team Umizoomi*, *The Wonder Pets!*, *Winx Club*, *Tickety Toc*, *Blue's Clues* and *Sid the Science Kid*.

Artistic beginnings Growing up in Manhattan, Paladino says he was always exposed to different types of arts and culture. His father and brothers were all musicians, and his mother was a writer. "I was very lucky, and knew I wanted to be involved in the arts in one way or the other," Paladino says.

Opportunity soon came knocking in the form of an acceptance letter from New York's prestigious The High School of Performing Arts (aka the "Fame" school).

"I focused on drama, but I knew I didn't want to be an actor," he says. "I was always making movies as a kid, so I thought going to the school would be great because I could learn how to work with actors. I knew I wanted to be involved in telling stories behind the scenes in some way."

After high school, Paladino graduated from Connecticut's Wesleyan University and spent some time directing off-Broadway shows and teaching acting and art classes. "There was something about working with kids and seeing their openness to performing that really inspired me and led to my work in children's TV," he says. "I learned I could make things for kids that worked to both entertain and inspire."

For his first job, Paladino landed a script coordinator role on Nickelodeon's *Blue's Clues*, and show creator Angela Santomero made a big impression on him. "She was really inspiring to me in terms of how she synthesized both storytelling and her work in children's education," says Paladino.

He also credits Little Airplane founder Josh Selig for his mentorship when Paladino worked on *The Wonder Pets!* "I learned a lot from the way he approached creating each episode as a little work of art that deserves a lot of care."

Move to showrunning According to Paladino, he never had a specific career-making moment, but rather a career that unfolded organically.

"It's about putting in the time and hard work. I've been very lucky, that it's been a steady incline of getting more responsibility and creative control," he says. "The biggest steps forward have come from the shows that have challenged me the most because they force me to work in a different way."

As a first-time showrunner, Paladino says it's critical to step back and look at the big picture while also remembering that every detail matters.

"In the past I might have thought, 'It's OK if the smoke coming out of that rocket plunging towards a planet doesn't look quite right,' whereas now it's like, 'We're working with NASA scientists, so we have a responsibility to get it right,'" he says.

Accessible science Despite being really interested in science, Paladino says he was never good at it in school. He and his childhood friend Adrian Grenier (of *Entourage* fame and the voice of Captain Joe on *Miles*, who also attended The High School of Performing Arts) used to make films together instead of writing papers for science class.

"We made a fun movie about the brain using Play-Doh, where we took out our friend's 'brain' and explored it. Because it was art school, you could get away with stuff like that," he says. "In a way, that was the beginning of *Miles*—making science accessible by slipping in some knowledge while you're being entertained." —Jeremy Dickson

Obsessed

What can't you get enough of right now?



Lisa Hryniewicz

Managing Partner,
Koko Rose Media

With the black hole left by Jon Stewart, I'm obsessed with **political comedies**: *The Brink*, *Veep*...and **Donald Trump!** And not just The Donald—the whole Republican Party!



David Michel

Founder,
Cottonwood Media

Both as a fanboy and as a producer, I'm obsessed with the new ***Twin Peaks***, which is shooting this fall for Showtime. David Lynch will shoot it as a 10-hour movie and only decide on the number of episodes/editing order with the network once they get into post.



Kevin Michael Richardson

Voice of "Groot" in Disney XD's *Guardians of the Galaxy* TV series

I'm obsessed with ***The Six Million Dollar Man*** DVD box set, **karaoke** and seeing people smile.



PJ MASKS

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Cartoon Network original miniseries *Long Live the Royals* got the greenlight partially based on the success of the net's first-ever miniseries *Over the Garden Wall*

Maximizing miniseries

How kids prodcos and networks are dipping their experimental toes into the miniseries format for traditional broadcast and SVOD

BY JEREMY DICKSON

As kids and families today become more accustomed to binge-watching their favorite shows wherever and whenever they want, content producers are increasingly utilizing the miniseries format for event programming.

Cartoon Network US broke new ground over five consecutive nights last November when it launched its first-ever original miniseries, *Over the Garden Wall*, created by the former creative director of *Adventure Time*, Patrick McHale. The 10 x 11-minute comedy/fantasy about two brothers who find themselves trapped in a strange forest world was a risk for the network, but it paid off. The miniseries reached a total of 4,277,000 viewers ages two and up and delivered ratings growth with each new episode. Interestingly, *Over the Garden Wall* had the same kind of performance when Cartoon Network released it globally at different times of the year. It's

also been performing well on the *Cartoon Network Anything* app since its debut, and a consumer products program is set to launch this fall.

Building on the success of *Over the Garden Wall*, Cartoon Network is launching two new miniseries later this year—an *Adventure Time* eight-parter and an original multi-part series entitled *Long Live the Royals* from the creative unit behind *Regular Show*. It's a comedy about a royal family struggling to balance the responsibilities of ruling a kingdom with life as a normal family.

Cartoon Network CMO Michael Ouweleen says miniseries provide the network with more opportunities to try different creative textures and give new properties a chance to get on air. "It's more of a development tool than a scheduling tactic," he says. "It's much easier to think, 'This needs to be made, let's find the right format.' The budget is not the driving part of the conversation, and that freedom of thought has allowed the network to be more experimental. And then it matches audience behavior, or the binge-watching of today." The challenging part, he adds, is getting writers to adapt to a longer, more serialized format.

"*Long Live the Royals* has been interesting. It's a different story structure than *Over the Garden Wall* in that each nightly

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episode is sort of told from one character's perspective," says Ouweleen. (Think *Arrested Development* season four on Netflix.) "For a *Regular Show: The Movie* format or the *Adventure Time* eight-parter, a show creator has to adapt from being a sprint runner to more of a middle-distance or marathon runner. So far, we've been successful with it. But it is a challenge for show creators to do that."

Miniseries as incubators

Another miniseries success story comes from Disney EMEA and its Liverpool, England-based production partner Lime Pictures with their live-action, teen-skewing *Evermoor* property.

Evermoor launched in fall 2014 on Disney Channel in 123 countries, including the US, EMEA, Latin America and Australia, as a four-part miniseries. It was also packaged as an original movie for select markets. Created by *House of Anubis* alums Tim Compton and Diane Whitley, the miniseries follows the story of American teenager Tara Crossley, who gets caught up in a mystery after moving with her family from the US to a spooky mansion in a small village in England.

Aside from its format, the production was significant in that it was the first-ever live-action movie produced in the UK to be broadcast on Disney Channel US, and Disney Channel's largest UK production to date. (Disney could not reveal the budget.)

Across EMEA, the show has so far reached 5.2 million viewers in 11 measured EMEA markets, and 2.7 million of its total viewers were kids. And according to BARB/AdvantEdge consolidated data, *Evermoor* was the second-highest-rated series on Disney Channel UK when it debuted last October, attracting more than 1.6 million viewers, with more than one in five girls ages eight to 12 tuning in.

"We know audiences love continued stories, and telenovelas work particularly well for Disney Channel throughout the world, so being able to program a miniseries on sequential evenings over a week in many markets that are telenovela markets proved to be very effective," says David Levine, VP of programming, production and strategic development for Disney Channels EMEA and GM of Disney Channels UK and Ireland. "Having the flexibility to program miniseries over a week, or across four weeks, or use them as a movie event, really gives us the ability to leverage the content in the best way possible."

From the beginning, Disney's strategy with *Evermoor* was to also create a show with spin-off potential. And following *Evermoor*'s success, Disney EMEA greenlit a 20 x 22-minute full season in March called *The Evermoor Chronicles* that is set debut later this year.

"As soon as we started developing *Evermoor*, we developed it in a way that could be a springboard for a series," says Levine. "We invested a lot in the sets, the talent, the writing teams and the production company." In fact, Levine says Disney EMEA's biggest priority post-launch has been to build out the talent. To that end, two of its stars, Georgia Lock and Finney Cassidy, were recently tapped to co-host Disney UK and Ireland's new factual cooking show, *First Class Chefs*. "The miniseries format can be a great talent incubator," Levine adds.

Next up for the Mouse House is *Mère et Fille: California Dream*, a brand-new four-part miniseries from Disney EMEA's French team based on the popular *Mère et Fille* interstitials that have been running on Disney Channel France since September 2012. The series, which



Big Bad Boo's preschool miniseries *Lili & Lola* already has a spinoff series in development



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Disney EMEA's newest four-part miniseries, *Mère et Fille: California Dream*, is based on Disney Channel France's popular interstitials (pictured) and is expected to debut in early 2016



was shot in Paris and L.A. in April and May, will also be packaged as a movie and is scheduled to air in early 2016.

Looking at other international kids networks, Australia's ABC3 is set to launch an ambitious teen miniseries event of its own with *Tomorrow, When the War Began*. Now in production and slated to premiere in Q2 2016, the six x one-hour dramatic miniseries produced in partnership with Sydney-based Ambience Entertainment (*Figaro Pho*) is adapted from the bestselling novels in The Tomorrow Series by Aussie writer John Marsden.

"*Tomorrow* is an ambitious series that will set a new benchmark for Australian family drama—this does take significant investment, and we have amazing support from Screen Australia and Film Victoria," says Deirdre Brennan, head of children's television at ABC TV. "As a public broadcaster, miniseries definitely work as part of an event strategy."

Miniseries for preschoolers

While Cartoon Network, Disney and ABC3 fine-tune their ongoing miniseries strategies for older kids, some studios are turning to the format for younger audiences.

Lili & Lola is a five x seven-minute animated miniseries for preschoolers created by Shabnam Rezaei and Aly Jetha, the co-owners of Vancouver, Canada-based Big Bad Boo Studios (*1001 Nights*). The series follows the big-city adventures of two sisters and their Iranian-Canadian family, who live in a small apartment in a building filled with interesting people from all over the world.


Rezaei says the decision to choose a miniseries format played nicely into the changing distribution landscape and resulted in *Lili & Lola* becoming the first original production to launch on multilingual OTT kids channel Oznoz (Rezaei and Jetha are its co-founders).

Lili & Lola's digital-first July debut in Persian has given Big Bad Boo a quicker means to use the series as a test bed for planned spin-off concepts. "We have the luxury of being able to test it on Oznoz with an existing customer base," Rezaei says, noting that the series has boosted the service's Persian customer subscription base by 70% since its debut.

On traditional television, the show is available on Canadian province British Columbia's Shaw Multicultural Channel and will launch on two more Canadian multicultural channels (Montreal's ICI Television and Toronto's TenTV) this fall.

Rezaei says packaging the miniseries for a traditional broadcaster was a bit tricky. "With Shaw's half-hour slot, we made it work by being creative with bumpers, short trailers and a sponsor message to fill it up," she says.

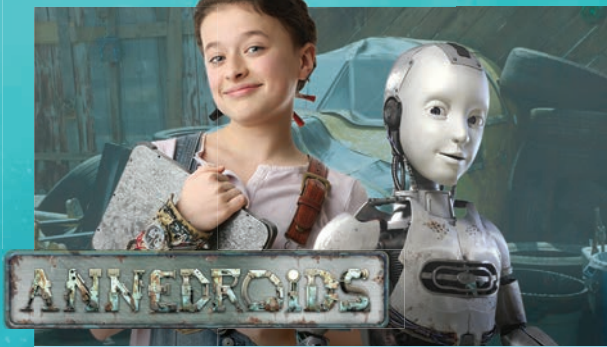
While Big Bad Boo looks to raise funds for five new episodes of *Lili & Lola*, the prodco is currently in development on *16 Hudson*, a spin-off series supported by Canada's TVOKids. The proposed 78 x seven-minute show will feature a larger world of characters and locations from *Lili & Lola* and be supported by a web and app series.

Ultimately, Rezaei hopes to produce multiple miniseries under the *Lili & Lola* umbrella, each featuring a new family from a different country. "Montreal's Nuevo Mundo TV has expressed interest in our concept for *Nick & Nora*, a Hispanic family from the *Lili & Lola* world," she says. 

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Just Launched Super Wings takes flight



Like its world-travelling protagonist Jett, *Super Wings* has taken off in a big way since *Tickety Toc* creator Gil Hoon Jung introduced the animated preschool concept to South Korean prodco Funnyflux Entertainment in 2013. To help achieve lift-off, FunnyFlux quickly joined forces with China's Qianqi Animation, Little Airplane Productions and Korean pubcaster EBS. The new 52 x 11-minute series, which bowed on EBS in 2014, has since been sold into more than 40 countries worldwide, including the US, where the brand's toy line will launch in October.

Packaging a hit Featuring a curriculum that supports cultural diversity and creative problem-solving, *Super Wings* follows the adventures of Jett, a self-assured jet plane who travels around the world delivering special packages to children. In each episode, Jett and his group of friends transform into the Super Wings and encounter problems that they must solve with every delivery.

With the characters visiting 52 cities in 45 countries over the course of the series, the diversity of new cultures—languages, environments, animals, dance and clothing—is explored.

Jung says the original concept of the show focused on life within an airport, but after testing, the producers decided it should be a fast-paced, globetrotting adventure.



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"It was at this time that we added the educational curriculum and included the characters' transforming abilities as this is something that is very popular in Asia and around the world," says Jung.

As the concept grew, New York-based Little Airplane came on-board to handle writing, casting and voice direction responsibilities overseen by Josh Selig (*The Wonder Pets!*, *Small Potatoes*), and QianQi was tasked with the animation.

For marketing support timed to the program's debut on EBS in September 2014, the co-producers held event birthday parties for kids in Korea where *Super Wings* mascots delivered presents, and the moments were recorded for YouTube. "It successfully utilized the show's concept of package delivery," say Jung. "We ended up directly meeting around 2,000 to 3,000 kids."

Additional stunts included a contest to send a family on an overseas trip, and a partnership with South Korea's domestic postal service that saw every packaged box branded with a *Super Wings* character. And on the heels of the campaign, *Super Wings* was EBS's top-rated animated series during its broadcast run.

Jung says the biggest hurdle for the project appeared when it was time to sell the show worldwide. "Trying to sell it internationally was a big challenge because we had never done it by ourselves before," he says. "In the beginning, we weren't sure that we could enter the Western countries, but when we started pitching the show, the broadcaster response was really positive."

The series soon caught the attention of 24/7 preschool net Sprout in the US, where it became the number-one rated show for its target audience after its March premier on the channel.

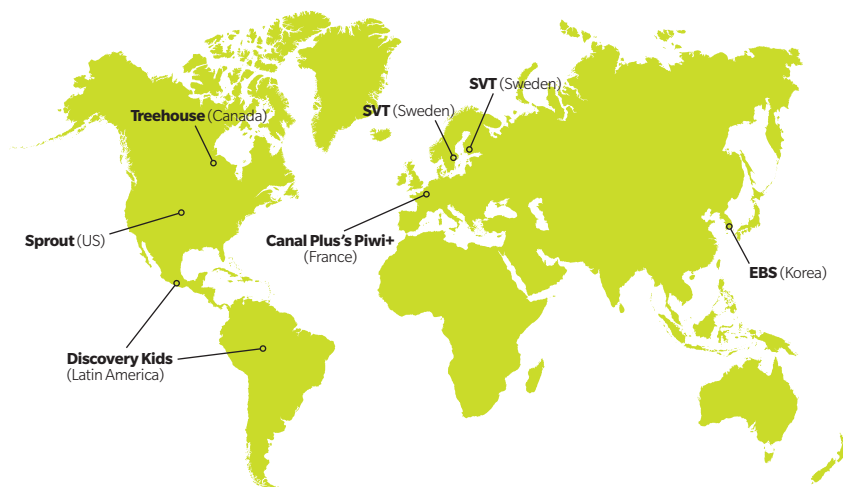
It's since been acquired by broadcasters including Discovery Kids (Latin America), Treehouse (Canada), Canal Plus's Piwi+ (France), SVT (Sweden) and YLE (Finland).

IP expansion With the property's China-based global master toy partner Alpha Animation and Culture Company set to roll out a toy program at Toy 'R' Us locations in the US in October via its new Auldey Toys of North America subsidiary, *Super Wings* is on its way to becoming a global brand. South Korea's CJ E&M currently holds global distribution rights (excluding Asia and the Middle East), while Canada's Nelvana Enterprises is repping licensing and merchandising rights in North America.

"Because it's the first-ever co-pro between Korea and China to enter the global market, we believe it should open some doors," says Jung.

On the SVOD and new media front, *Super Wings* generated a combined 500 million views across all six of China's main online streaming services in only three months. Based on the numbers, exclusive non-linear short-form content is planned, as is a second season, a movie and a spin-off series. "Our hope is to be the preschool version of Avengers," says Jung. —Jeremy Dickson

On-air



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Pipeline

An early peek at shows on the development track



Jessy & Nessy Dramedy/mystery series *Jessy & Nessy* is inspired by a bedtime story show creator and JAM head of development Chris Dicker told to his two young sons and their cousin Elly, who had just been prescribed glasses.

To make Elly feel more comfortable with her new eye-wear, the story featured a little girl who was the only one who could see funny characters with her magic "inspectacles." In the series, six-year-old Jessy is given an old pair of glasses from her grandmother that give her the ability to see different types of cartoon characters, including a friendly purple monster named Nessy. In each episode, the duo looks to solve a mystery behind a seemingly normal occurrence, like figuring out where the missing sock went, or discovering why the wind howls.

Producer: JAM Media (Ireland)

Style: A mixture of 2D, CGI, puppetry and live action against miniature backgrounds

Format: 52 x 11 minutes

Budget: US\$6.6 million

Status: Currently in development with a bible, trailer and one script completed. JAM will introduce the series at Cartoon Forum, then take it to MIPCOM and Kidscreen Summit with the goal of securing financing by spring 2016.

Delivery: Late 2017

⇨ PIPELINE CONTINUED ON PAGE 48

Ka-pow!

eOne Family's preschool superhero co-pro *PJ Masks* scores global deal with Disney

The odds of a preschool concept born from a series of French-language picture books landing a worldwide deal with a global broadcaster are not high. But that's exactly what's happened with new 52 x 11-minute CGI co-pro *PJ Masks* from eOne Family. MD Olivier Dumont snapped up the TV rights to French author Romuald's *Les Pyjamasques* book series for his prodco Frogbox before joining eOne in 2011. Fast-forward a few years, and Disney has picked it up globally for Disney Junior channels worldwide.

While the project was initially developed as a co-production between eOne, Disney EMEA and France Télévisions, Disney Junior US will debut the series September 18, before it rolls out to other international territories this fall. So what is it about this show starring a cast of preschoolers who masquerade as superheroes by night that got global buy-in from the House of Mouse?

The idea was first pitched to Disney France as part of a request for proposals issued by the broadcaster, says Dumont. It then moved onto Disney EMEA's London office, which joined as a co-producer, along with France Télévisions. Dumont says development took some time, and that the translation from books to TV series was trickier than anticipated. For one, the book series takes place solely during nighttime hours, which would not necessarily work for television. The entire daytime aspect and double-life of the TV series' lead superhero characters had to be created.

Disney EMEA's VP of content, animation and digital, Orion Ross, says he was immediately attracted to the idea. "It's a superhero show just for preschoolers," he notes. "It's safe, non-lethal and positive, but at the same time, it features real superheroes with cool costumes, gadgets and powers, delivered in an age-appropriate way—and it's so different from what is on the network." He adds that the protagonists' pajamas, which transform into costumes, and the fact that much of the action takes place at in a nighttime dream space, made the project even more appealing.

And while Disney's global teams work closely together, the US buy-in came relatively late in the cycle—well after it had been fully developed with Disney EMEA. For Karen Miller, Disney VP of worldwide programming strategy, acquisitions and co-productions, what really tipped the scale for her as the US buyer, was the texture, tone and feel of the animated content. (France's TeamTo is leading animation production for the series.) "Being able to create an environment that was very real to the audience, and well-executed with a cool look and feel that sits alongside Disney Junior's other programs, was key," she says.



PJ Masks makes its world premiere on Disney Junior US September 18

As to what made *PJ Masks* stand out as superheroes in a company that owns Marvel (home of arguably the most recognizable ones in the world), Ross admits there are a lot of superheroes in the Disney family, but none of them were made just for preschoolers. He says research conducted with parents and kids using the series' pilot showed that parents, in particular, were looking for superheroes custom-made for preschoolers. Interestingly, Dumont adds that further testing showed parents were insistent the main characters' costumes look like those of real superheroes, and not just slightly altered pajamas. "It was a clear call to action that was very consistent," he says. "Parents got it and embraced it right away." And costume designs were, in fact, re-worked to include more textures and gadgetry, like adding scales to Gekko's outfit and feathers to Owlette's ensemble.

It had always been Dumont's intention to create a global series with *PJ Masks*. "We made sure it was universal with strong story hooks and visuals, and that it could carry a licensing program," he says. With the Disney deal in place, consumer products is the next stop for eOne, which controls global distribution and licensing for the property. But rather than rush to market, eOne intends to start pitching it widely to the licensing community at Licensing Show next year after Dumont's team has sold the series into more terrestrial homes.

—Lana Castleman

Captain MONASTERIO



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Co-producers: Mondo TV (Italy), Suzy's Zoo Studios (US)

Style: 2D animation

Format: 52 x 11 minutes

Budget: US\$4.5 million

Status: A one-minute preview, full bible and four scripts are completed, with 11 additional scripts currently being written under the guidance of former BBC exec Theresa Plummer-Andrews. PBS Distribution has signed on for DVD distribution in North America. L.A.-based Lawless Entertainment and Mondo TV are handling L&M.

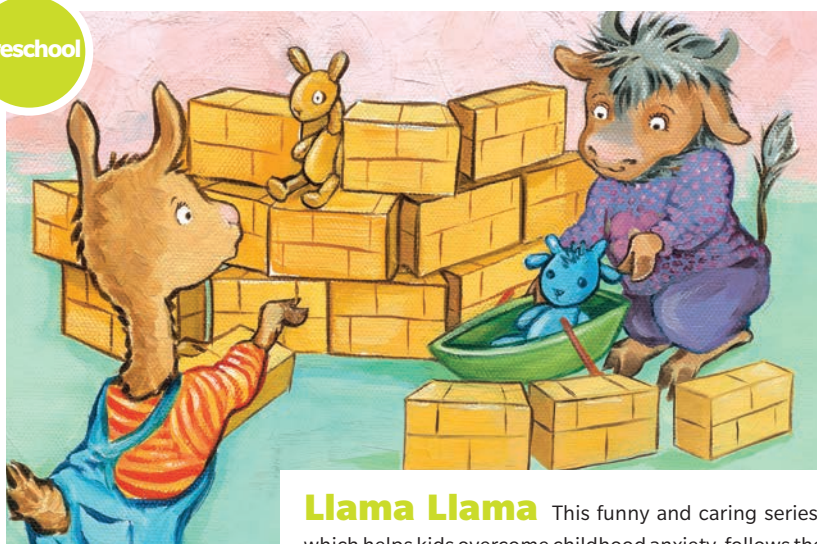
Delivery: Fall 2016/early 2017

4 to 8

Adventures in Duckport Based on the Suzy's Zoo art brand created by San Diego-based artist Suzy Spafford in 1968 that has spawned a wide range of consumer products and 28 book titles, *Adventures in*

Duckport follows the adorable animal adventures of main character Suzy Ducken and her best friends Jack Quacker, Penelope O'Quinn and Corky Turtle. The series encourages respect for elders and teamwork. Writers include three *Bob the Builder* alumni—Jimmy Hibbert, Darren Jones and Di Redmond—as well as *Puffin Rock's* Davey Moore.

preschool



Llama Llama This funny and caring series, which helps kids overcome childhood anxiety, follows the first steps of a young llama and the discoveries he makes as he grows up with his Mama Llama and a host of neighborhood characters. It's based on author and illustrator Anna Dewdney's bestselling children's book franchise, which has sold more than 9.4 million copies and been translated into eight languages. GBI's Andy Heyward and Amy Heyward, and Dewdney, Jane Startz and Reed Duncan are executive producing.

Producer: Genius Brands International (US)

Style: 2D animation

Format: 52 x 11 minutes

Budget: US\$300,000 per half hour

Status: In development, a bible is complete, scripts are underway and models are being created.

Delivery: Fall 2016

Leading ladies, kicking ass

Licensors vie for retail interest and market share in rapidly emerging girls superhero category

BY PATRICK CALLAN



Until recently, the leading role in the classic “superhero saves world from supervillain” script has largely been reserved for those with a Y chromosome. Sure, there have been memorable female crime-fighting crusaders—see Wonder Woman, Black Widow, Batgirl—but they’ve typically taken a backseat to their male counterparts, and they certainly haven’t been the centerpieces of multi-million-dollar franchises. However, there is a budding crop of superhero properties that will see female characters thrust into the spotlight over the next two years.

In fact, there may be a big shake-up coming to the male-centric superhero realm. At least four major female-focused superhero properties—DC Super Hero Girls, Miraculous—Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir, The Powerpuff Girls and Mysticons—are slated to hit the US retail market by 2017. And

A-list licensees across all major consumer products categories are lining up to grab a piece of the action.

Depending on who you talk to, there are numerous reasons why female superhero properties are finally getting their time in the spotlight, but what it ultimately boils down to is their perceived ability to generate significant sales. Analysts, licensors and licensees alike agree that there is definitely money to be made in this category in the near future. But as to whether or not it will be sustainable over the long haul, the jury is still out.

Early adopters

According to analyst Lutz Muller, the key to any emerging category is to get in early, establish a share of the market, and try to become the dominant player. The CEO of Klosters Trading has earmarked DC Super Hero Girls master toy

Cartoon Network's
The Powerpuff
Girls will be putting
their super powers
to work for a retail
invasion in 2016

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Thanks to good broadcast placement and a novel idea, French property *Miraculous—Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir* has locked down a global master toy deal with Bandai

partner Mattel to take the lead with the fall launch of an action figure line based on the property. He believes the toyco could become to the girls action figure category what Lego became to girls construction toys after introducing Lego Friends to retail in 2012.

"Whoever comes into a toy category first usually does the heavy lifting at the beginning, but then they're very difficult to dislodge from whatever market share they've captured," contends Muller. "So, what Mattel is doing is absolutely right. Everybody will see it doing extremely well and will want to get into the act, too, and you'll find other areas will open up—like games and board games—where girls are not sufficiently taken care of."

Muller estimates the action figure category is 95% male and poised to clear US\$1.6 billion at retail this year in the US. If Mattel, with its girls superhero action figures, is able to capture the same 10% to 12% revenue share that Lego Friends now claims in its category in the US, Mattel stands to generate sales between US\$120 million and US\$192 million with the DC Super Hero Girls line. But with disposable income being finite for most families, Muller says another category will be getting a haircut. "Parents aren't going to buy their daughters a Barbie and a DC Super Hero Girls action figure. It will be one or the other in all probability," he says.

BMO Capital Markets analyst Gerrick Johnson agrees that once the toy industry saw the homerun Lego hit with Lego Friends, it quickly realized that crossing categories was possible. Since then, toyco's have created a wave of girl-targeted versions of traditionally boys toys, like Hasbro's Nerf Rebelle line, which was undoubtedly driven by the success of female archers in movies like *Brave* and *The Hunger Games*. He cites the emergence of girls superhero properties as an offshoot of the larger leading heroine trend playing out. "There hasn't been anything in this range before for girls," he says. "There have always been girls superhero characters, but there's never been this concerted effort to present them in this way."

While it's hard to gauge the dollar value of the nascent category at the moment, it could eventually be worth several billion, contends Stephanie Wissink, MD and senior research analyst at investment research firm Piper Jaffray. "I don't think it's a small feat," she says. "Fashion dolls as an industry are worth US\$5 billion-plus. We know that there's a backdrop for a multi-billion-dollar translation of some of this content."

Content to the rescue!

In a recent report surveying 355 US mothers to better understand children's play and media consumption patterns, Piper Jaffray found that when compelling, engaging media converges with product—a common thread across these upcoming girl-skewing properties—it tends to convert to higher retail sales.

"Any time you can move from a generic play pattern to one that's content-inspired, you can drive pricing power," Wissink says. "For example, a basic fashion doll may sell for US\$6, while a Frozen doll retails for US\$12. The same is true for a generic girls superhero action



figure, which would probably retail for about US\$8. But one with some content backing it up might be priced at US\$15.”

Keeping with retail appeal, Carol Spieckerman, president of retail consultancy firm newmarketbuilders, adds that more entertainment companies are realizing they need to have strong female characters to create balanced and more profitable portfolios.

In addition, the success of male-dominated superhero franchises has emboldened entertainment companies to produce female-friendly versions. Currently, four of the top 10 spots on the highest-grossing movies of all-time list—*Marvel's The Avengers*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *Iron Man 3* and *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*—sit very comfortably in the boys action figure category.

“Female superhero launches are a natural way to optimize their offerings, particularly as Marvel and other superhero powerhouses continue to prove the viability of the model,” says Spieckerman.

For your average risk-averse retail buyer, investing in licensed merchandise of the superhero variety that's supported by strong content is a no-brainer. It's worth noting that 31% of all toys sold in the US in 2014 were based on licenses (NPD Group) and character/entertainment licensing accounts for 44.4% of the US\$241.5 billion generated annually by licensed merchandise in global retail sales (LIMA).

Looking at the path many entertainment companies are taking with girl superhero properties, it's clear they are following a familiar route that starts with animated TV content and leads to a master toy deal and then a multi-tiered CP program. But with no real data available to test the viability of this emerging category, many of the companies involved are taking a certain leap of faith and are not deterred by the prospect of failure.

Offering a princess alternative

“We think it's going to be huge,” says Kenji Washida, VP of brand management at Bandai, global master toy partner for new CGI-animated TV series *Miraculous—Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir* (26 x 22 minutes) from French prodco Zag. It's off to a running start this fall with broadcast deals inked with Disney EMEA, TF1 France, ABC Australia and EBS Korea.

“Girls toy spending has increased over the last few years as they are moving into new categories—categories previously dominated by boys,” says Washida. “We see superheroes as another area where girls will be ready to change the toy environment with a new way to play. Last year, both dolls and action figure categories grew, and we expect that trend to continue,” he adds. “There are a lot of girls toys on the market focused on fashion and princesses, so this is an opportunity to bring girls who are no longer playing with either back to the traditional/non-electronic toy world.”

The upcoming Bandai toy line (dolls, figures, plush, role play) is set to launch in fall 2016 at US mass and specialty retailers and will drive a sizable consumer products program. So far Rubie's (costumes), Accessory Innovations (bags, backpacks, luggage), H.E.R. (jewelry, hair accessories), Franco Manufacturing (bedding, bath), Komar

(pajamas, sleepwear, robes) and Handcraft Manufacturing (undergarments) have also licensed the property.

“The concept of a young girl as a superhero is a game-changer in both toys and entertainment,” contends Washida. “*Miraculous* has someone girls can relate to—Ladybug's alter ego, Marinette, who's a quirky but lovable girl growing up, going to school and having first crushes. She's also someone they want to be—the superhero Ladybug. When Zag came to us a few years ago, we jumped at the opportunity.”

Zag co-produced the series with Method Animation (France), Disney Channel EMEA, Toei Animation (Japan), SamG Animation (Korea), SK Broadband (Korea), PGS Entertainment (France) and AB International Distribution (France). And for Andre' Lake Mayer, president of brand strategy and consumer products at Zag, there were two key reasons why the company wanted to make this series.

Pointing to the success of DC and Marvel movies featuring male superheroes over the past 10 years (which, according to Box Office Mojo, have brought in US\$10 billion and US\$17 billion, respectively), Lake Mayer says there is huge potential in the underserved girls superhero market.

“There has been a healthy onslaught in TV, motion picture, publishing and video games of male-oriented superhero content in the marketplace, but nothing original for girls and girl superhero empowerment,” Lake Mayer says. “The other thing is the two big properties that had been trending—Monster High and Frozen—are cycling to the tail end, and the market is now ready for another big girls brand.”

Timing is everything

Cartoon Network, for one, is certainly hoping to step in and fill part of that void with its massive TV and retail reboot of 17-year-old *The Powerpuff Girls* in 2016. According to VP of consumer products Pete Yoder, despite the brand not having any new content in the market for nearly eight years, its endearing appeal has allowed it to remain culturally relevant.

“With the original fans now young adults, we think it's the perfect time to introduce a new generation to the girls and give moms of young daughters an opportunity to share their love for Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup,” Yoder says of the young Townsville, USA crime-fighting trio. “We believe there's a big market for girls brands that offer an alternative to the traditional ones that have long been mainstays in the industry. And with its mix of action and comedy, *The Powerpuff Girls* fits that bill.”

Clearly, Cartoon Network is not the only entertainment company to sense the opportunity that lies in revamping the award-winning series, which remains one of the kidsnet's top-grossing properties of all time, with more than US\$2.5 billion in retail sales. Spin Master, which just reported a 144.4% increase in Q2 sales for its girls and preschool business segment, is on-board as master toy partner. Penguin Young Readers Group and Disguise, meanwhile, have taken publishing and costume rights, respectively.

Another property looking to tap into the trending girls superhero space, catering to six to 11s, is *Mysticons*. The

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recently announced property was initially developed for a boys audience, but its TV series will ultimately star four girls who transform into legendary warriors.

"It was the recognition that we had this ambient expertise in action with generally heroic properties, and the moment is right to apply it to a more female audience," says Andrew Kerr, co-head of Nelvana Enterprises. The new Nelvana Studio/Topps Company co-pro *Mysticons* is expected to air in the first half of 2017, with Nickelodeon on-board as global broadcast partner.

"We saw that there was an opportunity to provide girls with linear TV content that was super heroic," Kerr says. "For a long time that wasn't the case. Girls six-plus were really being fed a steady diet of live-action, scripted comedy."

The emergence of Hunger Games heroine Katniss Everdeen and the whole Insurgent/Divergent phenomenon certainly helped whet the entertainment industry's appetite to test these uncertain waters, Kerr adds. "A number of points of evidence suggest there's a real opportunity on the merchandise side. What's the scale of that? It's really hard to tell. But if you get it right and appeal to the audience with the right combination of on-screen and on-shelf experience, the sky's the limit," he says.

Mysticons' consumer products program is still taking shape, but Kerr says it will aim to be ubiquitous, from mass market to online and specialty shops, when it launches in fall 2017. A key piece of the puzzle is Playmates, which has signed on to make Mysticons toys. Still in early development, the toy line will highlight the individual traits of each of the four main characters, while also being mindful of play patterns unique to girls.

"It's important to have content that creates an emotional connection for girls to the characters," says Gina Beebe, SVP of marketing at Playmates. "Girls love action and adventure, but they approach it differently than boys. Rather than smashing their adversaries, girls work more to outwit them. They also still gravitate towards traditional girls play patterns such as hair and fashion features."

Noise control

When it comes to play patterns, BMO's Johnson says it's all about the 3Cs—confrontation, combat and competition for boys, and collaboration, cooperation and camaraderie for girls. The contrast between the two, he believes, is the main reason why the DC Super Hero Girls franchise, for example, chose to depict its star characters, including Wonder Woman, Supergirl, Batgirl and Harley Quinn, as a team of relatable teenagers in their formative years.

"When you think about superheroes, they are combatants, really. So, that's why I think the DC Super Hero Girls franchise has been softened a lot to be more like Monster High meets The Super Friends. It's a little bit about the trials and tribulations of high school, friendship and teamwork, as opposed to fighting the bad guys," he says.

Featuring top-tier licensees like publishing partner Random House Children's Books and Mattel, the consumer products line will also play into girls' unique sensibilities. Mattel president and CEO Richard Dickson says the franchise will look to engage and inspire girls by providing cues to explore heroic acts through play and real life. DC Super Hero Girls content



Originally conceived as a boys action property, Nelvana has retooled *Mysticons* to appeal to girls with four leading female characters

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launches digitally this fall, and then the property will run the gamut of a full-scale CP program in 2016 across toys, TV specials, videos, apparel, books and more.

Piper Jaffray's Wissink also attests to the fact that when much of the aforementioned content and products start hitting the market, female superhero characters will generally be portrayed in a different light than their male counterparts.

"Boys love things to be strong, powerful and loud," Wissink contends. "For a little girl, there still has to be attributes of authenticity, genuineness and compassion. So what you see in some of these brands is that the way they 'save the world' tends to be a little bit more tender, playing up those attributes of little girls' femininity. The superpowers they have tend to be about helping instead of being a victor."

Victory is mine?

With the industry pouring millions of dollars into launching several girls superhero properties, it's obvious that optimism is in the air. However, to turn a phrase from category inspiration The Hunger Games, it's highly unlikely the odds will be in everyone's favor.

For Wissink, who says consumer confidence has improved but not entirely rebounded since the last recession, it's difficult to know what shape the sales curve will take for these properties.

"Does it rise and start to mature, or is this truly a changing of the dynamics in terms of the mix in the consumer goods industry? Are we moving into an industry where girls superhero characters are going to be part of the mainstay collection?" she asks. "I don't think we have the answer to that yet."

"There hasn't been anything in this range before for girls. There have always been girls superheroes, but there's never been this concerted effort to present them in this way."

—Gerrick Johnson, BMO Capital Markets


BMO's Johnson, on the other hand, argues the category will most likely cycle through the market over the next three to four years, and then exit, due to the hit-hungry nature of the toy business.

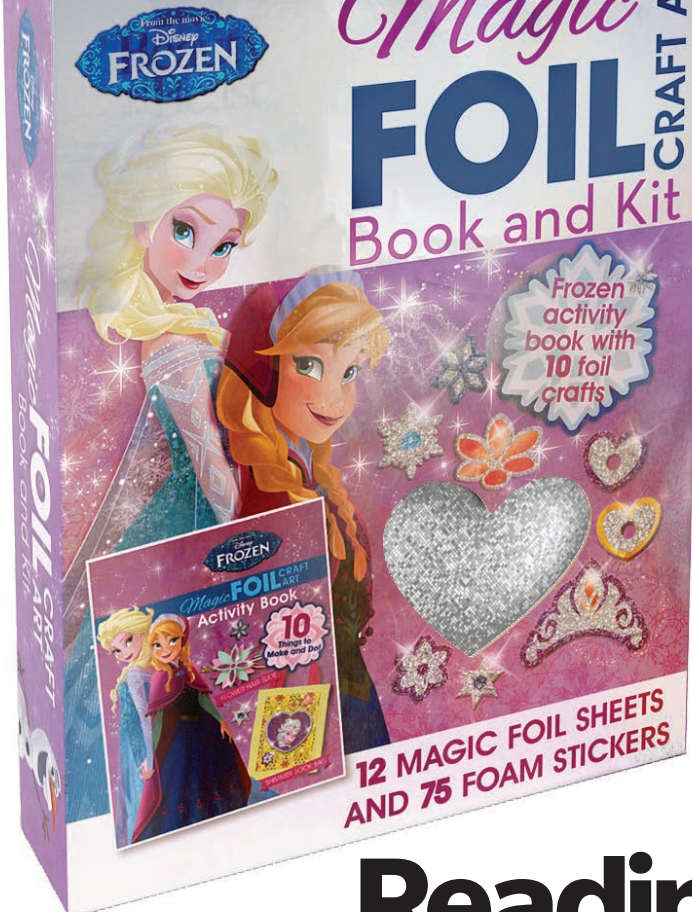
"It's a hit-driven business," he says. "It's not all that unique that these girl-specific products would be out of the market at some point. But I think when these things cycle down, we won't see them anymore, while other things will cycle down and reach an equilibrium level of sales. Lego Friends might be around for awhile, but Nerf Rebelle and these superhero toys for girls will—at some point—go away."

Only time will tell whether or not the category fizzles out after a few years, becomes another cog in the toy wheel, or continues to accelerate alongside its male counterpart, as new-marketbuilders' Spieckerman thinks it will.

In the meantime, for those looking to take the next step and extend the current momentum, Spieckerman says the key is to optimize female superhero portfolios and content planning across a broad range of age groups and devices to ensure a longer lifespan and continuous consumer engagement. Granular analysis of viewership and purchasing data might help, as well as close collaboration between entertainment producers, licensors, licensees and retailers.

And for licensors who want to get the most out of their IPs, they should aim to pick the right partners rather than simply go for scale, Spieckerman adds. And by right, she means partners that are willing to get behind launches and show support from merchandising, content and e-commerce perspectives.

"In some cases, that may mean forging physical retail partnerships with one retailer and digital with another," Spieckerman says. "Ideally both will be at work, but it may not always make sense to tie up every expression of a property with a single retailer." 



Parragon's four new "books plus" lines are each expected to boost its sales by US\$30 million in the next few years

Reading between the lines

Global publisher Parragon finds opportunity to expand "books plus" business in the US market

BY PATRICK CALLAN

Parragon is starting a new chapter in its North American business, marked by significant expansion in the kit/gift set category with four branded ranges that will feature licensed and proprietary IPs. The push comes as the UK-headquartered publisher's US division forecasts exceptional growth potential in this "books plus" category—to the tune of US\$30 million for each of its new ranges over the next three to five years.

"The goal is to open up new retail opportunities. We want to look at incremental growth beyond the traditional book space—that's really the key with our own brands," says Parragon Global president and COO Wendy Friedman. "For us, it's about building within our own brand, coming up with really inventive point-of-sale, and then figuring out how we can merchandise both efforts in the permanent and promotional space."

To get the ball rolling at retail, the new products will debut this fall. First up are Parragon's proprietary mass-market Craft Factory kits, which offer unique hands-on crafts and DIY activities (sewing, stamping, jewelry design, clay modeling) and come with a 32-page how-to book. Craft Factory is launching with two SKUs. Creative Tubes will debut in the US in October with four themed kits (puppy, kitten, owl, zebra), while a Creative Box Sets line hits retail in January with six SKUs (rock band, balloon buddies, friendship bracelets, foil jewelry, clay animals, chalk games).

In December, the publisher is also extending its premium baby/toddler range Little Learners, moving it more into the gift category with the launch of a Hush Little Owl book and plush gift set, as well as the Baby Milestones sticker pack gift set. (The Little Learners line first launched in the US and UK in 2012.)

Then in 2016, Parragon's new licensed lines will start to roll out. The first to market in January will be Disney's Frozen selfie kit, which comes complete with a book detailing how to take the best selfies, photo booth props, and (of course) a selfie stick. Disney's Magic Foil craft art book and kits featuring Frozen, Cinderella and Beauty and the Beast characters also launch in January. The kits come with things like stickers, glittery foil and a book with 12 projects to build that follow a Disney storyline.


Parragon's other key license getting the kit/gift set treatment, The World of Eric Carle, launches in February featuring the legendary American children's author's distinctive art and iconic characters. The range will be a mix of interactive and novelty formats such as activity pads with collectible cover-mounted gifts/toys and carry-along activity sets. It will also feature new formats like the storytime four-in-one activity game set, activity and jigsaw puzzle set and a show-and-tell story set.

In March, Parragon will debut the Disney Shadow Puppets line, letting kids use stickers, props, a flashlight and a how-to storybook to create their own shadow puppet theater. Parragon will also launch interactive Factivity sets in March, which combine illustrated 128-page encyclopedic books with all the tools kids need to build a dinosaur or a human skeleton.

Moving into spring/summer 2016, Parragon is launching its own premium Maker Craft line in May, which includes Maker Craft Dresses and an adult SKU. And in June, new Be STEAM Smart science-based activity kits will teach aspiring engineers and scientists important first concepts and real-world applications for subjects like coding, circuitry, optical photography and 3D printing.

As for where to find all these "books plus" SKUs, Parragon's key retail partners include traditional books stores like Barnes & Noble, mass-market retailers Walmart and Target, specialty stores Jo-Ann's and Michael's, and larger super-market chains like ALDI.

Parragon will look to reinforce its retail presence in the "books plus" space throughout 2016 by replenishing its numerous distribution channels with fresh content. By the end of next year, the publisher intends to have 22 SKUs in its own range, and talks are currently in the works with several big-name licensors to extend the licensed range as well. Announcements are expected soon.

"The expansion of our partnership with various licenses is definitely the key for 2016," says Friedman. "We're looking at evergreen, A-list, entertainment-driven licenses. We're also looking at global brands and what we can bring to the table. For instance, unlike with Disney, we're not using third-party assets for our Discovery Kids products—we're creating the story, content, photography and illustrations ourselves. As a publisher, we're able to do that." 

The evolution of the game

Disney's Playmation redefines the meaning of toys-to-life

In the throes of a never-ending tug-of-war between traditional and digital retailers for consumer toy dollars, a growing number of kids entertainment companies are finding plenty of opportunity in the middle ground.

We're all aware that the toys-to-life category is on fire. To recap: The category, which didn't exist until 2011, is now worth US\$4 billion at US retail and has seen 47% growth between March 2013 and March 2015, according to market research firm The NPD Group.

Disney got in on the action relatively early with Infinity in January 2013, and it rolled out version 3.0 late last month. However, its newest digital/physical product hitting shelves this fall essentially flips the toys-to-life category on its head. With Disney's Playmation, instead of importing plastic figures into a digital game, kids strap on gear and become a part of the game themselves.

"It's an entirely new category of play. There is nothing like it out there," says Nitin Chawla, VP of strategy and business development at Disney Consumer Products & Interactive Media. "Playmation combines the latest technology and storytelling from across The Walt Disney Company to inspire kids to play the way we did growing up—to run around and use their imaginations."

Playmation looks to bridge the generational gap between today's touchscreen kids and a growing chorus of parents clamoring for the return of nostalgic play patterns who also see an important role for tech toys. In fact, a recent Disney-commissioned third-party study of 2,000 families across the US discovered that a full 90% of respondents were in favor of new technology that could play a role in keeping their kids active.



Instead of importing missions into a video game, Disney's Playmation encourages kids to take it outside


"It's clear there is a major opportunity to meet the needs of both parents and kids, and we feel Playmation is the answer," Chawla says.

The first Disney mega-franchise to get the Playmation treatment is Marvel's Avengers, with starter kits (US\$119.99) slated to hit the market on October 4 in the US and Canada at mass and specialty retailers, select Disney stores and DisneyStore.com. Starter packs will consist of five Hasbro-designed connected toys—a repulsor, two power activators and two smart figures (Captain America and Iron Skull).

By attaching high-tech repulsor gear to their arms, kids six and up can become an Avenger recruit and help to save the planet from the comfort of their own backyards or living rooms. Iron Man's operating system Edwin Jarvis guides players during gameplay, which features all of the Avengers and most of the IP's villains as smart figures. Each figure comes complete with its own unique personality, music and unlockable content for players to reveal as they progress through the levels. And through the *AvengersNet* app, players can then track their progress, explore different locations/characters and get new missions.


"It's important that the gameplay experience stays true to the Marvel storylines, characters and universe, and we've worked closely with the creative teams to make sure we do just that," Chawla says.






Following the Playmation starter kit's launch in October with Avengers, Hulk hands and additional smart figures will be added to the line before the holidays. In addition, Disney is developing Playmation systems based on global franchises Star Wars and Frozen for launch in 2016 and 2017, respectively. —Patrick Callan




TROTRO



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Iconic characters tailored for success

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Maya the Bee to swarm the UK

Studio 100, Brands With Influence partner on regional CP program for global property

BY PATRICK CALLAN

With a hit TV series, more than 300 global licensees and a 3D-animated movie sold into more than 160 territories, the global buzz around Belgium-based Studio 100's Maya the Bee is making its way to the UK.

London-based distributor Primal Screen has picked up UK movie rights (as well as Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland) and will launch Studio 100 Media and Buzz Studios' preschool flick *Maya the Bee Movie* on big screens in the UK on October 23.

Local agent Brands With Influence has been tapped by Studio 100 to handle the property's UK licensing activity. The goal is to create a wide-ranging consumer products program, targeting mass to mid-tier retail, with strong support coming from grocers, toy retailers and department stores.

BWI plans to anchor the program with core categories like toys, games, publishing and apparel. Footwear, stationery, back-to-school, partyware, promotions, digital/apps, toiletries and housewares will round out the larger CP program. "What we are striving to deliver are multiple touch-points across each category," says BWI director Dom Wheeler. Overall, the program is looking to use Maya's unique on-screen characteristics in order to make appealing merchandise for the property's target audience of boys and girls ages three to six.

"Maya is a friendly, adventurous and curious little bee who understands the importance of friendship," says Christophe Drevet, Studio 100's international consumer products director. "The core brand elements of protecting and valuing our natural environment are also crucial considerations for any product within the Maya licensed portfolio."

The UK consumer products line is taking cues from the brand's global CP program, which has had success using in-store promotions to drive brand awareness and retail sales.

In Benelux, for example, Studio 100 partnered with FMCG giant Unilever and more than 200 Emté and Alvo grocery stores to offer customers a free Maya the Bee figurine when they spent €15 (US\$16.74). More than six million figurines were given away during that promotion. In Poland, a partnership with supermarket chain Biedronka and disposable personal hygiene products company Ontex led to more than 20 million diapers being sold.

"It is important we utilize the correct products to appeal to our retail partners and target audience," Drevet says. "We tailor-make promotions and products relevant for their targeted consumers."

While there are no official UK deals to announce at the moment, as BWI has only recently signed on to rep the brand and engage in licensing talks, there was a special screening of *Maya the Bee Movie* on July 12 for potential partners, and the feedback has been positive, Wheeler says.

The property (which originated as an early-20th-century German novel before being adapted for comics, TV series and film over the years) has already been gaining traction through the new TV series' placement on free-to-air TV channel Tiny Pop in January 2014. According to Studio 100, more than 1.5 million kids in the UK have watched the series over the past six months, and on average, more than 40,000 viewers tune in for each episode in its 6:30 p.m. timeslot.

BWI expects to announce a host of deals very soon and then launch the majority of Maya the Bee merch at UK retail in early 2016. However, there's an outside chance some items could be on-shelf earlier. "We may be able to work with distribution partners utilizing the existing products produced for European markets for more immediate distribution," Wheeler says. **K**



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5 CN NETFLIX CTV KIKI gulli

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kid
insight



Get smart

Classrooms have changed a lot in recent years, but the back-to-school season still marks a key time for marketers to engage students and families



BY WYNNE TYREE

The classrooms that kids are returning to have changed significantly since most marketers were children. Outdated policies and trends are making way for new back-to-school shopping habits, fresh styles of clothing and high-tech challenges. Here's what going back to school means for the current class of digital natives.

School already? While the US school year historically started after Labor Day to accommodate the agrarian economy, that policy has shifted, with many states and districts starting increasingly earlier in August—some even during the very first week of the month. (Giving teachers more time to prep for standardized testing that happens in the fall played a significant role in this timeline shift.) Though there are school and teacher benefits to a shorter break, families are finding difficulties in adjusting to the new schedule. For example, they have to take vacations earlier in the summer and start back-to-school shopping sooner—at a time when shopping for fall clothes is the last thing on their minds.

Summer BTS marketing With earlier start dates, schools, stores and brands are aiming to make purchasing school necessities easier for parents. From JCPenney to Walmart, retailers are pushing up dates of their back-to-school sales—some even before July 4—to accommodate families' revised spending schedule. However, this creates a disconnect. Shopping for this period used to be a time to invest in fall and winter outfits, but it now falls in June and July, when temperatures are soaring and stores are stocked with summer clothing. This presents a challenge (as well as an opportunity) for retailers as items traditionally acquired in one sweep over a few days are now purchased in waves over several months.

Skipping the store Some families, however, don't want to invest their time and energy in multiple rounds of shopping, crisscrossing town to find the best deals and hauling purchases home. New businesses have popped up and partnered with school districts to give parents a one-click option to get everything their student needs delivered right to their door. For example, Edukit not only customizes school supply bundles for districts across the country, but it also allows parents to pay

classroom fees at the same time. Such services take marketing out of the equation. But if brands can make their way into the bundles, they can also make their way into homes and schools. In addition, brands are attempting to create their own one-stop back-to-school shops by way of printing lifestyle catalogs. Target's impressive mailers—one for kids and one for college students—help outfit a student from head to toe, as well as from decked-out study desk to bedazzled locker door.

What break? The meaning of the first day of school itself is changing for students. It used to be a chance to see everyone after a long summer apart—a time to see what the cool kids were wearing, hear about everyone's summer vacations, and check out how one's crush had changed and matured. But now with social media and digital messaging to keep them in constant contact over the summer, there's far less suspense. That said, the first day back is still a critical moment in students' lives. They carefully plan their outfits, not only because they want to make a good impression among their peers, but also because they'll want to post it on Instagram for all their friends to see and like. The social network has made personal style more of a focal point than ever, and students are responding by putting increased attention on their fashion choices. While self-expression has always been important to young people, it is now recorded on multiple social sites for the world to see—so it's an even more significant part of their lives.

Bring on the phones Instagram isn't the only app revolutionizing the school year for students. Schools are beginning to give up fighting the cultural current and are relaxing smartphone bans on campus, which means more apps are becoming a regular part of the school day. While some teacher-approved apps aid instruction, students are drawn to those that help them connect with their peers. Messaging apps are surging, and the most popular among them understand key needs and desires in students' communication habits. Kids love *Popkey* because it lets them send animated GIFs. The app's funny scenes from pop culture essentially allow them to communicate without having to type a single word, making messaging quicker and easier between classes. Addressing young people's limited data plans for their devices, *Jott* is

What's so great about...baking?

BY MOLLY AUSTIN



Including a child in the cooking or baking process can be daunting. It's undoubtedly more time-consuming and messier than solo, grown-up culinary efforts. And adults often struggle to choose a kid-friendly recipe that's more challenging than Easy-Bake and less frustrating than a seven-layer cake.

Despite these challenges, including kids in baking endeavors can provide them with valuable learning opportunities. The most obvious benefits fall under math and science skills, practicing cooperation and social skills, and learning to follow directions. The lesser known, but equally important, benefit is fostering and practicing planning. Kids plan when they follow a recipe in a specific order with the end goal of getting a dish to turn out properly. Planning is a crucial part of cognitive development, under the umbrella of the development of self-regulation and executive function.

In fact, executive function and self-regulation are the mental skills that give us the ability to multi-task, shift attention, focus and plan. They're controlled by the frontal lobe of the

brain, one of the last areas to fully develop. The first signs of the development of executive function and self-regulation occur towards the end of the first year of life, when a baby is able to keep something in mind (i.e., a desirable toy, her parents' iPhone) without being distracted. These skills continue to develop well into adulthood, and express themselves in the form of organization, time management and focus.

The process of baking and helping kids understand the result of following steps in a specific order is a great way to support the development of planning and executive function. By allowing children to see the cause and effect of what happens when you follow instructions in a certain order to achieve an outcome, you're helping them develop their self-regulation skills. In the case of baking, dumping ingredients into a bowl leads to lumpy sludge. Measuring, pouring, mixing and heating achieve a more desirable outcome—brownies!

Many kids already have the propensity to cook and bake, and are excited by shows like *Cupcake Wars*, *Chopped* and *MasterChef Junior*. To increase kids' understanding of following steps and planning, these shows could include on-screen recipes and checklists that track with contestants as they are working. Non-cooking shows could also include planning and clearly breaking down the process for kids. In the toy realm, kids cooking and craft kits should include more of the cause-and-effect of the process (i.e. "Bake for 20 minutes. Baking any longer causes moisture to leave your brownies, so they won't be gooey!"). Not only will this help kids follow directions and regulate their actions through planning, but it will also make their creative ventures successful and satisfying—not to mention potentially delicious.



photo: Tim Pierce

insight Kids Molly Austin is a senior analyst at Insight Kids, a passionate team of business strategists and developmental experts who spend their waking hours pondering and communicating timeless truths and timely trends. Through innovative qualitative and quantitative market research and consulting, they bring the voice of the child to the creative process, helping their clients create products and experiences that meet kids where they are. To connect with Insight Kids, please email info@InsightStrategyGroup.com, or check out www.InsightKids.com.

likewise quickly growing in popularity among students because users don't need to have a messaging plan or be connected to Wifi to text. The app employs a mesh network, which uses nearby phones, rather than cell towers, to distribute messages.

Cool classrooms While students and teachers may occasionally battle over cell phone use during school hours, kids tend to view educators in a particularly positive light. As much as parenting has shifted toward "peerenting," instruction style in the modern classroom is becoming less prescriptive and more hands-on and collaborative. At the same time, teachers are cultivating a different mood, outfit-

ting their rooms with cool curtains, comfy sofas and chairs, and colorful rugs. Kids admire their teachers and they learn and develop together. As a result, teachers can be a brand's greatest untapped resource as they indelibly shape children's preferences. When the hip head of the class announces he or she prefers a specific brand over all others, 30 kids run straight home to demand their parents buy it. **K**



Wynne Tyree is the president of Smarty Pants, a youth and family research and consulting firm.

Heads Up! is derived from the company's daily immersion into kids' and families' lives, as well as proprietary quantitative research. For more information contact Meredith Franck at 914-939-1897 or visit asksmartypants.com.



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Oceanhouse Media's
*The Cat in the Hat—Read
& Learn* is the first in a
new line of book apps

BY WENDY
GOLDMAN GETZLER

Oh, the places they're going

Children's book apps have come a long way since they first trickled onto iTunes in 2009. New consumption patterns are pushing developers to take their products to the next level.

Like iPads at family restaurants, Dr. Seuss fans are everywhere. So it came as little surprise to Greg Uhler and his colleagues at Oceanhouse Media that Apple's support crew took a keen interest in his company's most recent venture—a newly revamped lineup of educational book apps based on popular Seuss titles.

Uhler, who is director of research and development at the California-based mobile maker, has spent the past two years evaluating book-app content and features, and the outcome is *The Cat in the Hat—Read & Learn*. The enhanced book app includes Oceanhouse's signature text-scaffolding features, as well as 31 learning activities designed to help kids ages four to six practice literacy skills such as spelling and rhyming. It's setting the pace for three more redesigned Seuss titles slated to launch this year: *Green Eggs and Ham*, *Dr. Seuss's ABC* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*

As Dr. Seuss Enterprises' sole mobile licensee, Oceanhouse has churned out more than 40 branded book apps to date, which together have been read more than 100 million times via iOS and Android devices. (Its original *The Cat in the Hat* app alone comprises 25% of that figure.) The numbers

are large, but the kids mobile space has become gargantuan, and idling isn't an option.

"Today, there is a certain level of depth that apps need to have. The customer base is more mature in what they expect from an app, and with this launch we hope to set a new bar for what kids expect," says Uhler. "When we first launched apps in 2009, they took advantage of what you could do on an iPhone. The iPad wasn't even around yet. [It launched in April 2010.] As the devices and operating systems have upgraded, we saw that many book apps had animations, gestures and other features that were engaging to kids. Our offerings started to look a bit dated."

In modernizing things, Uhler and his team aimed to provide a simple and clear user interface that a child could handle on his or her own, more animation, and a "delight" factor—some element that makes the user laugh or engage. The new app series also has significantly more user-controlled animation—rather than flat artwork—and educational activities embedded into the story.

"Due to competition, it's much more challenging to launch an app and have it be successful, even with a strong brand in your pocket," says Uhler, who also develops apps



Opening up
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for Little Critter and Berenstain Bears. "There's more consolidation, which makes it harder for smaller companies and unbranded material to be financially viable," he says. "Expectations are higher. 'How do you justify the development cost?' The moment you want to make an app [rather than an eBook] and start adding features like narration, word highlighting and animation, the cost goes up." Without divulging Oceanhouse's actual cash outlay, Uhler says it's difficult to build an engaging book app for less than US\$10,000—and some developers are spending upwards of US\$250,000.

Books get bundled

If there's any indication of a market shift, perhaps its best embodied in NetKids, New York-based Cupcake Digital's new subscription-based platform that houses narrated storybooks, along with on-demand videos, gaming apps and music. The two-month-old iOS product is being offered to subscribers in the US and Canada for US\$8 per month.

Graham Farrar, whose company zuuka and its iStoryTime library app were acquired by Cupcake Digital in March 2014, says the NetKids subscription model is an answer to controversial in-app purchasing that only gives kids a taste of entertainment (and parents uninvited phone charges).

"We learned from our two-year-old iStoryTime library that subscription is much easier for parents and kids. Ninety-six percent of revenue from the App Store comes from in-app purchases, which is a flaw," says Farrar, who now leads corporate strategy at Cupcake. "There's no real way to preview or trial an app. Just picture going into a book store where all the books are sealed in cellophane—there would be a lot fewer books sold."

"The moment you want to make an app [rather than an eBook]...the cost goes up"

— Greg Uhler, Oceanhouse Media

Kids are now more technologically sophisticated and discerning than the ones Farrar aimed to please in 2010 with his first book app, which was based on DreamWorks' How to Train Your Dragon. NetKids is relying on the element of choice—picture several hundred premium apps hailing from Cupcake's and iStoryTime's library of licensed content—and the lure of familiar TV characters to stand out from the pack. (Television and book content will include titles featuring Peanuts, Sid the Science Kid, Strawberry Shortcake and DreamWorks brands).

"It's like TV 2.0. You download the app, it's all ad-free, and kids can watch, play and read offline. It's a blend of dessert with fruit and veggies," says Farrar. "Even with the presence of videos in NetKids, we are seeing that kids are selecting the books along with the videos. For young boys like my son, that's not an ordinary occurrence. The books are narrated, so there's not that much of a distinction between them [and the videos]."



Storytelling meets design in StoryToys' suite of 3D book apps

Standing out

A NetKids-like subscription model is also on the radar for Barry O'Neill, CEO of Ireland-based digital publisher StoryToys. As the App Store becomes increasingly overcrowded, O'Neill is always looking at ways to stay ahead of the curve. His paid apps for iOS, Google Play and Amazon—both original and licensed—use a 3D pop-up book technology first introduced in an original Rapunzel storybook app in 2010.

"At the time, a Rapunzel storybook app was a novel thing. Now, there are 2,000 to 3,000 versions of Rapunzel apps available," says O'Neill. "Since then, we have gone deeper on interactive elements. The pop-up effect in our books has been strong, and we've integrated a camera that literally lifts kids off the page."

The narrative element of his pop-up book apps (25 titles and counting) speaks to kids ages two to seven, says O'Neill, admitting that once kids get older, they become more interested in games than stories. That said, StoryToys has built up its licensing efforts to engage older kids, and the company recently struck a deal with Saban Brands to bring the Power Rangers into its fold. O'Neill also has more comic book titles on the horizon.


Given recent Ofcom findings that show 70% of five- to 15-year-olds in the UK have access to a tablet, StoryToys creates narratives with devices in the forefront. According to O'Neill, this is what gives book apps a significant edge over traditional eBooks, which have limited interactivity (just sounds and tapping) and are downloaded to a dedicated eReader device.

"eBooks are an electronic manifestation of the text from a physical book, sometimes with minor enhancements. Our book apps—or enhanced eBooks—can feature videos, sorting games and complex audio interactions. From a consumer perspective, it's more immersive."

In terms of *when* kids are immersing themselves in these products, StoryToys metrics offer some telling insights. For example, app usage tends to spike between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. on weekend mornings, indicating that kids are being sent back to bed with their iPads in-hand. As such, the company released *Wake Up Mo!*, a 3D pop-up book that familiarizes kids with morning routines.

This sort of digital-first mentality to book content is where Oceanhouse's Uhler thinks the future is headed, as he believes more authors and illustrators will create books with their digital incarnations in mind. "I think more authors will consider apps as they develop new books. For example, an artist illustrating a physical book can work in Photoshop using layers to enable animation, perspective shifts and effects by the app developer," he says.

And according to Cupcake's Farrar, opportunities may also be found in synergies between book apps and physical televisions.

"You can put a narrated book with highlighted text on the TV screen, and kids can happily watch like it's a cartoon. But we all know it's a book on the big screen," he says. "Everything evolves, so if we can make that experience, it's not a bad thing. Plus, it beats watching cartoons that are interspersed with commercials." 



Canada comes of age

Family Channel's flagship tween series *The Next Step* returns for a fourth season this fall

The Great White North continues to punch above its weight in live-action sitcom and drama productions for tweens and teens

BY JEREMY DICKSON

Oh Canada. It's the celebrated home of maple syrup, hockey and *Degrassi*-star-turned-rapper Drake. Within the global kids entertainment biz, the country is gaining a reputation as a burgeoning breeding ground for high-quality TV sitcoms and dramas that target tweens and teens.

This is not surprising to anyone who can trace Canada's worldwide success in the genre back to the 1980s origins of long-running series *Degrassi*. Or perhaps, more recently, to 2011, when YTV-commissioned multi-cam sitcom *Mr. Young* from Vancouver-based Thunderbird Films and Corus Entertainment's Nelvana Enterprises began its three-season run.

With favorable tax credits, accomplished studios and strong support from organizations such as the Canada Media Fund, the Bell Fund and the Shaw Rocket Fund, Canada has become another option beyond the US, Europe or Australia as a go-to territory for co-pro opportunities in prime-time sitcoms and dramas for kids.

Creating a laugh factory

Corus Entertainment-owned YTV has been a market leader in live-action scripted sitcoms and scripted comedies produced in Canada.

The aforementioned 52 x half-hour series *Mr. Young* quickly rose to become one of the network's top-rated shows after it premiered in March 2011.

Created by prolific Canadian TV producer/writer Dan Signer, the showrunner behind a number of popular Disney sitcoms including *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* and *A.N.T. Farm*, *Mr. Young* also struck a chord with audiences outside Canada when Disney XD picked it up for channels in the US, the UK, Spain, Portugal, Italy, the Netherlands, Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

Following the program's international success, and the launch of another hit sitcom, *Life with Boys* from *Hannah Montana* co-creator Michael Poryes, YTV chose to work with Thunderbird Films again in 2013 on a brand-new home-grown series created by Signer and *Mr. Young* executive producer Howard Nemitz called *Some Assembly Required*.

Like *Mr. Young*, the live-action comedy series was shot in front of a studio audience in Burnaby, British Columbia, and it has been a ratings driver for YTV since it debuted last year.

YTV and Thunderbird also just announced a third season, and Netflix picked up the show for streaming this year in all territories except Canada, where it will debut in 2016.

The series follows the adventures of 14-year-old Jarvis Raines (*The Next Step*'s Kolton Stewart), who runs a toy company with six of his best friends.

"*Some Assembly Required* is 100% Canadian. It's beating all the other sitcoms on the network and has done so consistently now," says Corus Kids director of content Jamie Piekarz.

"We knew we had to do something different, so it's interesting that the show is set at a toy factory," she notes. "In fact, one of the great things about our sitcoms is that almost none of them take place in a school, which is usually the trope with sitcoms for this demo."

One of YTV's newest original hits is *Max & Shred*. The co-production with Nickelodeon and Toronto's Breakthrough Entertainment takes advantage of the colder Canadian climate for its story about an unlikely friendship between a celebrity snowboarder, Max Asher (*Annedroid*'s Jonny Gray), and a science whiz kid, Alvin "Shred" Ackerman (*Life with Boys*' Jake Goodman).

"We heard right away from our audience that they loved the program's snow-based environment. They hadn't seen that before in a lot of shows," says Bronwen O'Keefe, Nick SVP of content strategy, who oversees scripted series including *Max & Shred* and *Make It Pop* from Canada's DHX Media.

O'Keefe notes that *Make It Pop* has been a consistent top-ranked show since the K-Pop inspired, single-cam tween sitcom launched on Nick US in April.

"There's amazing talent in Canada on every front. For *Make It Pop*, the look and feel is very different from anything seen by a US audience. Production designer Stephen Stanley, who worked on *Degrassi* for years, was able to give the school environment a whole new twist," she says.

The series, which is produced out of DHX Media's Toronto-based Epitome Studio, was picked up by Nick for a second season just a month after its TV debut, and it will also launch on YTV in Canada on September 9.

For *Max & Shred*, American showrunner George Doty IV (*iCarly*, *Victorious*, *Drake & Josh*) was brought on to lead production, and the series premiered on YTV and Nick US last October. It's since become a success on Nick's international channels in countries including Africa, Australia, Colombia, Italy, Portugal, Russia and the UK.

"I didn't know what I was going to find [in Canada] because I had never worked outside of Los Angeles," says Doty IV.

Resourcefulness pays off

Mentorship programs, skilled crews, creative casting strategies and efficient showrunners are all doing their part to bolster Canadian-made shows. According to Corus Kids director of content Jamie Piekarz, when YTV started production on *Mr. Young*, one of Canada's first multi-cam sitcoms, Nelvana had to learn a lot on the fly, and sometimes the studio didn't have the technical know-how to shoot certain elements of a sitcom.

"We made a deal that our Vancouver-based partner Thunderbird Films would give workshops to the larger production community as a way to really bolster the industry," says Piekarz. "They made sure every writer would learn a different part of the production, so there was a lot of training going on, which is the spirit of children's TV. We're a small community and we want people to succeed."

Piekarz also credits the creative abilities of some of the casting agents YTV has worked with over the years. "We don't have the kids talent pool that the Americans have, and a lot of kids don't have agents, so we've done all kinds of different things. For *Some Assembly Required*, we put sides up on YTV.com and kids could record and audition through an online video portal that went straight to Thunderbird," she says.

And now that YTV has produced a number of hit sitcoms, Piekarz says it's become quite viable for kids in Canada to get roles. She says another welcome change is that all of YTV's sitcoms now have an acting coach on set. "It's crucial for shows to be successful," she says.

YTV's also improved the on-set scripting process for its sitcoms by having writing rooms run for the duration of each series. The biggest challenge, according to Piekarz, is finding unique concepts and showrunners, and although the network's utilized some great Canadian talent in Dan Signer (*The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, *Mr. Young*, *Some Assembly Required*) and Ken Cuperus (*The Stanley Dynamic*), it did look south of the border when it hired *Hannah Montana* co-creator Michael Poryes and *iCarly*'s George Doty IV to helm *Life with Boys* and *Max & Shred*, respectively.

But, says programming head for Canada's DHX TV Michael Goldsmith, as long as the Canadian production community continues to learn and remains diligent, the talent will take care of itself. "It takes a big commitment from all sides to make it work, but I'm not concerned about showrunners and writers. There are people out there to do this really well in Canada," Goldsmith says.



YTV's *Max & Shred*, a co-pro with Nickelodeon and Breakthrough Entertainment, packs a comedic punch popular with teens worldwide

"It's interesting because there are a lot of places outside of L.A. where you can shoot, but the creative still comes from L.A. What I found is that Toronto has an entire creative community as well. Everyone on *Max & Shred* was Canadian, and our team was as good as any I've worked with before."

Dramatic growth

A number of Canadian production companies are leading the charge on the tween and teen drama side of the business, too, including DHX Media, Temple Street Productions, Fresh TV and marbledmedia.

And while there have been a number of exciting new series announcements this summer, including Temple Street Productions' and DHX Television's reality-style tween drama *Lost and Found Music Studios* from *The Next Step* creator Frank van Keeken, nothing was perhaps more dramatic than when US net TeenNick and Bell Media's MTV Canada pulled the plug on beloved series *Degrassi* after 14 years on the air.

Less shocking, however, was Netflix's move. Together with DHX TV's Family Channel, the SVOD swooped in and greenlit a brand-new Epitome Pictures reboot, *Degrassi: Next Class*, just five days after the June 4 cancellation.

The situation further reinforces the ongoing transition of teen audiences away from traditional TV towards SVOD services.

According to executive producer Stephen Stohn, Epitome Pictures had hatched a reboot plan months before the Netflix deal even materialized.



"In January, [*Degrassi* co-creator Linda Schuyler] and I got together with the writers and said, 'We need to rethink what we're doing and break new boundaries,'" says Stohn.

"We told them to write their stories for the season, but pretend the show would be on Netflix and watched by Generation Z. It was a shorthand way of saying, 'Forget any preconceptions of what any particular linear broadcaster wants.' The writers were delighted with the challenge and came back with an entire pitch, which was ultimately *Next Class*."

In an attempt to age up its post-8 p.m. lineup, Family Channel has a first-run window on the series, which will bow in January 2016, followed by a global rollout on Netflix.

Beyond the challenge of serializing the stories differently for binge-watching, Stohn says another issue will be the number of episodes expected to be released at once.

"With Netflix being in so many countries, we have to deliver the content in a lot of different languages right from the start. This adds more pressure on us from a dubbing and subtitling perspective," he says.

While *Degrassi* moves forward for a new generation, the future of another high-stakes teen drama produced by Epitome Pictures, in association with Toronto's marbledmedia, is more uncertain.

Open Heart, which debuted in January and follows the story of a rebellious teen out to solve the mystery of her father's disappearance, resonated with TeenNick's US audience, but failed to hit a home run on YTV in Canada.

"We felt good about the US numbers, and the online engagement was incredible with a couple hundred thousand app downloads, but in Canada it was a little bit of a disappointment," says Stohn, who executive produced along with Schuyler, showrunner Ramona Barckert, and marbledmedia's Matt Hornburg and Mark Bishop.

Piekarz says YTV commissioned the show in response to viewers' requests for drama on the channel—recognizing the fact that more kids are watching conventional dramas—and because the channel had some room to experiment in its lineup.

"It's a fantastic show with a dedicated fan base on social media, but we learned it's hard to change a brand. The promise of YTV is comedy. We knew all of this going in, but nothing ventured, nothing gained," she says, noting that the show is now on ABC Spark to give it another life.

Tween power

Embracing the music and dance sensibilities of its core tween demographic, DHX TV's Family Channel continues to excel when it comes to commissioning Canadian-made

The speed factor

According to American showrunner George Doty IV (*iCarly*, *Victorious*), who executive produces one of YTV's newest hits, *Max & Shred*, with co-producers Nickelodeon and Toronto's Breakthrough Entertainment, the main difference between shooting a sitcom in the US versus Canada is speed.

"In the States, we would make three episodes a month, but in Canada we make about five. *Max & Shred* was pretty relentless, but we were all up to the challenge. It's nice to work at this pace," Doty IV says.

"The model for how sitcoms are made in the US is pricey and time-consuming. If a couple of days can be shaved off, then good."

Programming head for Canada's DHX TV Michael Goldsmith says the biggest challenge in producing the company's original tween dramas—like popular reality-style dance series *The Next Step*, upcoming series *Lost and Found Music Studios*, as well as Family Channel's newly greenlit and highly anticipated teen series *Degrassi: Next Class*—is maintaining a high-quality sheen without going over budget.

"It's trying to make a show look like it's super-high-budget while knowing that you have to be budget conscious because you need to deliver volume," Goldsmith says.

"This is where we really appreciate both DHX's commitment to making shows, but also the efforts of our production partners who have been very resourceful putting shows together—finding ways to film more and make it look great without cutting corners on writing, music, dance or casting."

"In the States, we would make three episodes a month, but in Canada we make about five."

—George Doty IV, showrunner, *Max & Shred*

Degrassi: Next Class executive producer Stephen Stohn agrees that DHX Media-owned Epitome Pictures must be prepared to be leaner and faster.

"Every year we have to increase quality, but also keep costs where they were and even figure out how to reduce them," Stohn says. "Luckily, the technology is there. There is so much we can do now with rear-screen projection and computer-generated fixes that we can make shows look better without too many additional costs."

He adds that *Degrassi* has always been shot fairly quickly in blocks of four half-hours over 11 days, or two and three quarter shooting days per episode.

"I've looked at getting it down to 10 days, or just being more productive in the 11 days by finding savings elsewhere through new post-production techniques or delivering electronically rather than physically. It's a daily challenge," he says.

Another efficiency-driver for Canadian producers when dealing with budgets is the bank show, or when portions of another episode are shot during a regular shooting week.

"It's not a nice thing for producers, but Canadian producers are masterful in the way they rise to these challenges," says Corus Kids director of content Jamie Piekarz.

According to Doty IV, who's never done bank shows in the US, the bank show model wasn't deployed for *Max & Shred* because they didn't want to disrupt the creative flow of the production.



DHX Media's tween-skewing *Make It Pop* has been a consistent top-performer across all Nickelodeon platforms

dramas. It recently picked up Temple Street Productions' reality-style series *The Next Step* for a fourth season, announced a second partnership with the Toronto prodco for *Lost and Found Music Studios* and joined forces with Fresh TV for a third music- and dance-themed series, *Backstage*.

"Drama in North America feels new on the tween side, and it's nice when your audience embraces something new. It's been interesting to watch kids talk about serialized TV so much," says DHX TV programming head Michael Goldsmith.

"Ratings are great, and it's definitely something we're going to do more of. The idea of building around event programming—something that HBO and AMC are doing such a good job with—there is no reason why we can't do it for kids."

For the third season of *The Next Step*, Family Channel aired one new episode per night over a three-week period, and according to Numeris data provided by DHX, the stunt attracted 479,000 unique viewers each weeknight.

Goldsmith says Family will continue to do monthly stunts on an occasional basis, but it's most important strategy will be week to week.

"As successful as it was running all the episodes out in March for season three of *The Next Step*, it's difficult to sustain that in terms of purchasing and building enough content," he says.

Strength of many

As Canadian kidscasters and prodcos extend their hot streak in sitcoms and dramas for tweens and teens, Piekarz says the budgets and the quality of programs will

continue to go up, and additional financing will always be welcome.

"The Canadian funding system has great opportunities, but our biggest opportunity is to do more co-productions," she says.

Canadian nonprofit Shaw Rocket Fund, which its president and CEO Agnes Augustin says has always been very proactive in ensuring there is content for tween and teens, has to date invested US\$170 million in Canadian children's programming in every kids and family genre.

And since 2010, the Canada Media Fund has contributed more than US\$300 million in funding to 406 children's and youth productions, generating US\$1.2 billion in production budgets.

Despite the support, Augustin notes that it's still not easy to fund multi-cam productions in Canada, but she foresees more opportunities based on the global successes of partnerships à la YTV and Nick.

"Sitcoms always do quite well and kids around the world are watching Canadian shows however they can; this will continue and so will the Fund's intent to create Canadian kids content," says Augustin.

For Epitome's Stephen Stohn, Canada's knack for securing funding from multiple sources has always been one of the biggest strengths of its TV production industry.

"It's been our forté. Take the US, for example. A kids and family broadcaster in the US can't pay as much and has two choices—one, an American producer who is used to having a show funded by the broadcaster, or two, a Canadian producer who is used to looking for funding from multiple sources," he says. "Suddenly Canadian productions look very attractive." **k**



Zodiak Kids' *Mister Maker* is a perennial favorite with preschoolers, thanks to its informational and entertaining format

Real screens

The digital revolution has made market opportunities a lot more plentiful for kids factual entertainment

BY BRENDAN CHRISTIE

Historically, kids factual has never had a huge presence in the overall kids TV market. It's a genre traditionally driven by public service broadcasters, which tended to tailor shows to fit in-house needs, and then later the likes of cablecasters such as Discovery Kids and Nat Geo Kids took the reins.

But the launch of digital platforms like YouTube, Hulu and Netflix has changed the game—in more ways than one. In fact, they've challenged the very notion of what kids non-fiction content is.

Take, for example, the strange and wonderful phenomenon of unboxing videos—literally, videos in which kids and adults open packages on camera. Between 2013 and 2014, the number of unboxing videos on YouTube grew by 57%. A Google search will now deliver more than 20 million channels that offer up seven-plus years of content and draw more than a billion views every year. According to Google Consumer Surveys, one in five consumers has watched an unboxing video.

STEM dollars?

Factual sometimes has the advantage of attracting non-traditional funding sources—STEM financing in the US, the Wellcome Trust in the UK and The National Science Foundation in Ireland, for example. Novel Entertainment co-founder Mike Watts also points to the new live-action tax credit in the UK, which only became a reality in April.

“The biggest difficulty with factual shows has been the lack of opportunity to exploit them internationally,” he says. “So, the tax credit is a shot in the arm for these kinds of productions. It will make the difference between operating on a production fee basis and making a viable global project.”



With 2.6 million-plus channel subscribers, the VlogBrothers are helping to drive kids' uptake of factual content on YouTube

US commits to increased STEM funding over the next five years

This past spring at the 2015 White House Science Fair, the US announced more than US\$240 million in new STEM Commitments, underlining the government's focus on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education across the country. One of these new initiatives included a US\$25-million grant competition to support the creation of science- and literacy-themed media to inspire children, especially those from low-income homes.

The Department of Education's Ready-to-Learn Television program announced a competition for five-year grants that support the development of educational television and digital media targeted at children and their parents. This is the first time in Ready-to-Learn's history that the program will include a specific emphasis on science programming.

The new TV shows, interactive learning games, websites and apps produced by Ready-to-Learn grantees are intended to engage children in the world of science, and help them put into practice the skills they need for success in school. This new competition will build on Ready-to-Learn's prior success in helping to create educational programming such as *Word World*, *Super Why!* and *Peg + Cat*.

The new STEM funding will also include a US\$90-million “Let Everyone Dream” campaign. Building on the documentary *Underwater Dreams*, which depicts the inspiring story of a group of under-resourced Hispanic high school students taking on an MIT team in an underwater robotics competition, the Let Everyone Dream coalition focuses on getting under-represented students inspired to succeed in STEM subjects.

If you think it's just a weird fad, consider the fact that one of the most successful channels on YouTube right now is FunToyzCollector with five million subscribers and 7.6 billion hits. It features an unidentified woman opening Disney toys, and it generated an estimated US\$4.9 million in revenue last year, according to OpenSlate, a video analytics platform that analyzes ad-supported content on YouTube.

While that viewership might be neither the industry's cup of tea nor its intended target, it does clearly demonstrate three things. One, kids are insatiably curious. Two, factual entertainment is whatever the hell they say it is. And finally, kids will come out in droves when content aligns with their interests.

“I think YouTube has almost single-handedly reinvented factual kids content,” observes Dylan Collins, CEO of London-based marketing platform SuperAwesome. “The number of video views driven by how-to guides, science walk-throughs, etc. is phenomenal. One of the key changes is the emphasis on quality of information being given versus quality of production.”

Kids are brought up on social media now. Most of what they experience on screens is “real”—well, at least it's real people in real-world situations. They're less concerned with what it looks like than what content it offers. (Visit social video platform Vine if you want plenty of evidence.)

“The biggest searches from kids are ‘how to do’ something, or ‘what is’ something,” observes Zodiak Kids Studios CEO Michael Carrington. “Kids are not necessarily just going to watch piano-playing cats anymore. They're seeking out everything from watching snakes attacking crocodiles, to baby condors being born, to time-lapse footage of buildings being created or ships being built.”

On-demand accessibility has inarguably changed things for the kids non-fiction genre.

Malik Ducard, global head of family and learning at YouTube, has three sons and admits to occasionally binge-watching digital video edutainment on a Friday night. In fact, he says, “I've caught my sons after bedtime with my laptop watching some of these edu-tubers late



at night. It's kind of one of those things where I can't be completely mad at them because they're watching stuff that's really broadening their minds and their horizons."

Digital platforms have changed the value of screen time and put an emphasis on easy and fun education. "I saw it with my 13-year-old when he had to solve for the perimeter of a circle," observes Ducard. "When I was growing up and I had to figure that out, my mom told me to go look it up. In this age, 'Go look it up' means turning to YouTube, and that's the first thing he did." His son landed very quickly on a video that walked him through it. "He naturally thought I remembered it," he laughs. "He's still none the wiser that I didn't."

Ducard points to factual YouTube creators like the VlogBrothers (Hank and John Green), who create amazing content around history, social issues and science. (John also wrote the hit YA novel *The Fault in Our Stars*.) Then there's Michael Stevens with Vsauce, who answers

questions like "How much does a shadow weigh?" and explains difficult scientific concepts in entertaining ways. Or SmarterEveryDay, MinuteEarth, MinutePhysics, the-brainscoop—there are literally thousands of YouTube channels explaining the world to kids in fun and educational ways.

It's changed the kids factual dynamic. They aren't sitting back—they're leaning forward into their learning. "In the YouTube space, there is a fine line between creator and viewer, where viewers often see themselves as participants or even creators," notes Ducard. "It can be a sort of light participation, by liking a video or commenting on a video, or a more advanced one, like creating a response video or creating a fan video based on something they love. We see a whole range of activity, and sometimes that scales by age, but oftentimes it is really driven by the tastes and interests of the viewer and that individual."

Lights, camera, mobile To be successful, be accessible

CINEMANIACS is an eight x half-hour live-action, factual entertainment magazine show aimed at getting kids interested in filmmaking. It's presented by prolific YouTuber Oli White and features cameos with a range of industry greats from Michael Sheen to Ron Howard. The series is produced by Oxford's Novel Entertainment and airs on CBBC.

Novel co-founder Mike Watts puts the show's success down to three factors: It imparts information,

it inspires kids, and it's also entertaining.

"Programs for this age can't just be a passive watching experience," he says. "Kids have to get up and say 'I love that! I want to make that,' or follow online."

What lessons has he learned from making the series? Mostly, that the content had to be meaningful to the audience.

"The content had to be entirely realistic for what they could achieve on their parents' mobile

phones in their own home," notes Watts. "It had to be accessible and possible to replicate—something they could genuinely do at home and not be discouraged by. We don't want them thinking, 'Oh, we don't have one of those.'"

"The content can't be too complicated—it has to be something children feel is within their reach. It couldn't be filled with industry jargon, or be patronizing, or so technical that it left kids confused."



Hollywood legend Ron Howard guest-stars in an ep of **CINEMANIACS**, which aims to educate kids about filmmaking

Learning digital lessons

Of course, this revolution hasn't gone unnoticed in the broadcast world. Ashley Rite, director of development and international sales at Tricon Films—a company that produces and distributes shows like *The Next Star* and *Supergroup*—says she's seeing an almost insatiable need for programming “that feels like it's happening that very moment.”

Scripted animation takes a long time to come to market, but magazine formats and factual offer a faster turnaround. That's not to say those big animated series are ever going out of style, but the mix is changing, and new opportunities are coming up fast. “We're seeing broadcasters being more responsive to user-generated platforms that have been successful—the Maker Studios of the world and AwesomenessTV,” she says.

It's giving everyone permission to take more risks, and giving them the freedom to look for non-traditional approaches to programming. “When everybody looks to the user-generated content on YouTube, and to web series like *High School Video Game*,” observes Rite, “I think it pushes traditional producers to look outside of what's normal on any channel or platform.”

That openness even extends to where things are sourced. “I'm definitely finding that location is much less of an issue,” she says. “When we used to do format sales, even as little as five years ago, it was strictly a format sale. Now it's a larger conversation about us producing or tweaking the existing series to work for a broadcaster internationally. [Kids] don't care if it feels too Canadian, or too German, or British, because they watch everything.”

But while digital is driving the evolution of the genre, it's certainly not—at this point in time, anyway—driving revenue. Broadcast remains the backbone of the funding model.

“One of the challenges for monetization within the digital kids space is that the infrastructure for advertising is very under-developed,” notes SuperAwesome's Collins. “Once this is addressed, the size of the market will be five times what it is now. Mobile transactional revenue suffers from the same issues—it monetizes at about 1% of the general games category. The reality is that digital content for kids will always require multiple revenue streams. There are no silver bullets.”

Models are still evolving, though. Genevieve Dexter, founder and CEO of Serious Lunch, who worked with Toff Media on *Horrible Science* and Maverick on *Operation Ouch* (see “Something Horrible this way comes,” opposite), says she didn't even approach digital platforms when it came to funding *Horrible Science*. She had funding from an outside body, but part of her reluctance came from the fact that platforms like Netflix still prefer to do top-up financing and want a broadcaster on-board. Plus, a worldwide deal with a digital platform can make other distribution deals less attractive.

“Netflix says: ‘We'll put in 15%,’” she says, “and then the distributor says, ‘I'll put in 15%—but not if you do the deal with Netflix,’ because they want to do that deal



themselves. I've seen lots of distributors buying worldwide rights and then essentially just selling them lock, stock and barrel to Netflix. That's easy money.” But even that is changing, she notes. Digital platforms have built expansive libraries and can afford choosier nowadays.

Telling real stories

While the digital markets sort themselves out on the advertising and revenue fronts, evolutions in technology and storytelling are helping to address some of the financial imbalances.

“Traditionally, factual is not something you can commercialize extremely well, and the margins on making it have always been quite small,” contends Zodiac's Carrington. “So, it's not been a priority in any independent production company's business plan—to live off a small production fee on the back of a huge expense. Having said that, production costs have fortunately come down over the last decade or so, with new technologies and new cameras and new ways of shooting.”

Carrington says it echoes the days when cable and satellite first came along. They broke new ground—



Something *Horrible* this way comes

Toff Media goes into the production lab with Scholastic's *Horrible Science*

Ask most kids producers what factual program they most admire, and odds are you'll hear *Horrible Histories* mentioned a lot. The Lion Television/Citrus Television/CBBC production set a high standard for kids non-fiction, clearly demonstrating that factual and fun are not mutually exclusive.

It's natural, then, that there is some attention being paid to the follow-up show, *Horrible Science*. The Scholastic property was originally licensed to Lion, but it went into turnaround. (Possibly because the BBC, which had so much success with *Horrible Histories*, is already having plenty of luck with Maverick Television's science-based medical show *Operation Ouch*.)

London's Hat Trick Productions picked up *Horrible Science* for one of its sub-companies, Toff Media, founded in 2008 by comedians Alexander Armstrong and Ben Miller. Toff was successful in placing the show on CITV (its first kids factual series in a while), and then approached Genevieve Dexter, founder and CEO of Serious Lunch, to help find the remaining financing.

Serious Lunch, which also works on *Operation Ouch*, successfully sold *Horrible Science* to ABC Australia and Discovery Asia (both of which had success with *Ouch*), as well as to the Wellcome Trust. The global charitable foundation based in the UK is dedicated to improving health by supporting bright minds in science, the humanities and social sciences, and by promoting public engagement.

Was a science show a harder sell than, say, kids animation? Not according to Dexter. "I've always found that if you have something that's genuinely good and different, it's easier to sell than animation," she says. "The animation market is really dominated by the majors and people with very deep pockets—who, in some

cases, are prepared to basically give away the program to get the slot. That makes it pretty hard for independents."

There is also not a lot of STEM programming in the market, she says, and the broadcasters who do want it are prepared to pay for it. "And, of course, *Horrible Science* is already a brand, so you don't have to explain what it is."

Much like its predecessor, *Horrible Science* is a bit of a sketch show, with a big animated component that pays homage to the Nick Arnold brand that was established in the books. *Science* is a show-within-a-show. The conceit is that the characters are about to put on a show about science. Viewers travel backstage with the cast and crew, and then move onto the show, which features guests like Marie Curie and Sir Isaac Newton in period dress, coming on to talk about their latest discoveries.

Given the audience and the subject matter, animation remains a key component. "When it comes to explaining scientific elements, it's much easier to do it graphically or in costume," says Dexter. "*Operation Ouch* does quite a bit of animation to explain to you exactly what has happened to the body during an accident.

"Animation has always been very useful for that—right from the diagrams in your biology book—explaining things that are really impossible to explain in words. So I think animation, especially in science, comes into its own."

Horrible Science goes to air in this month. And Dexter has high sales hopes for the new series, given her previous experience. *Operation Ouch* sold well globally, was dubbed into non-English versions, and Maverick also produced Dutch and Danish versions.

mostly because they didn't have much money to get channels up and running. "They had to find new formats and new technology to help them bring stories to life," he says. "And I think that is where we are again now. Creative things happen and stories are broken down in different ways."

He notes that the world seems to be moving at an ever-faster clip right now. "I'm sure it's always felt like that," notes Carrington. "But we're constantly asking ourselves how new platforms and new technologies are changing storytelling, and we keep coming back to the conclusion that storytelling hasn't really changed. It's how you execute it and use technology to give it some kind of new visual sense—make it dynamic and interesting. And, of course, how can you use the platform itself to interact and engage with the audience?"

When it comes to engagement, Novel Entertainment co-founder Mike Watts contends that the factual shows performing the best in the UK—*CINEMANIACS*, *Operation Ouch*, *Horrible Histories*, *Mister Maker*—all have a lot in common. "They impart information, and inspire kids as well as entertain them. They are all fast-paced

and entertaining, which seems to be the best way to engage kids and draw them in."

Carrington says he still sees kids factual falling into two general frames—preschool, with excellent examples like *Mama Mirabelle's Home Movies* and *Andy's World*; and older, personality-driven shows such as *Deadly 60*, *Horrible Histories* and the legendary *Bill Nye the Science Guy*.

"These things have to provide invisible learning," adds Serious Lunch's Dexter. "They can't be didactic or specific. You can't have a halt in the comedy to explain this particular scientific point unless it's gruesomely interesting in itself. A lot of times, it comes down to the scripting and the on-screen talent and their ability to pull it off, because it can fall flat as a pancake."

But what's the biggest lesson that digital has taught the genre?

"Go for it," suggests independent children's media consultant Justine Bannister. "It's extraordinary what kids are watching and how they find stuff. Everything has changed very radically in the last two years. Whatever people will watch is content now—whatever is entertaining or compelling. It's an extraordinary period right now." **k**

It was like walking into **Willy Wonka land**. It was a bit of a risk building a **17-foot-high bear statue** and throwing it on the floor. **Looking back I wish I had worried less.** There's been a trend towards creating traditionally boys products for girls. But interestingly, you haven't seen it the other way around.

● Nickelodeon's **Bronwen O'Keefe** describes how she felt walking onto the stylized set of DHX Media's *Make It Pop* for the first time

● CMO **Michael Ouweleen** on Cartoon Network's super-sized Comic-Con marketing campaign for new series *We Bare Bears*

● *Miles from Tomorrowland* showrunner **Sascha Paladino** reflects on his early years as a freelance writer

● BMO Capital Markets analyst **Gerrick Johnson** mulls over the issue of gender in the toy aisle

Vive l'Originalité!

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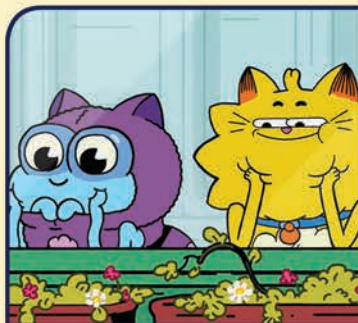
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